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March 10, 1891.

No. 711.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

Vol. XXVIII.



OR,

The Pard Detectives' Clever Deal.

THE ROMANCE OF A BLUNDER.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER BRUJA'S WARNING.

"SWEET pertaters!"

"What is it now, Billy?"

"You have no right to complain about it's bein' hot. If I could take off my flesh, and go around in my bones like you do, I'd never say a word about hot weather, you bet."

"Great ginger! don't you s'pose I can feel the

"GO BACK! GO BACK!" SHE CRIED, IN FAIRLY GOOD ENGLISH. "IN SANTA FE IS ONLY DEATH FOR YOU."

heat as well as anybody else, even if I am thin?"

"Yes, I s'pose you can, but only in proportion, you know."

"Oh, you git out! To hear you talk, anybody would think you weigh a ton."

"Say, though, Skinny, why don't you try to pick up a little meat? I don't want to have to take ye home as thin as I brought ye out. I'd be ashamed ter do it, and that's the fact."

"Pick up meat! I'd like to know how I could do that, with the worry I've got on my mind all the time."

"Worry on your mind—you?"

"Yes, me!"

"I'd like to know what you have got to worry over!"

"The troubles I have in trying to keep you straight, that's what."

"Sweet pertaters! you are gettin' personal in your remarks, my gay an' festive feather-weight. Let's change the subject."

Broadway Billy and "Skinny," his partner. It was the afternoon of a terribly hot day, the latter half, the sun being far in the West.

The two lads were about entering the city of Santa Fe, on horseback, coming from an easterly direction, both.

Splendidly mounted, attired in their typical cowboy costumes, each with a lariat coiled on the saddle-horn, and both well armed.

As Billy made his last remark, they turned a point and a view of the city burst upon them.

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed the New York delegate, "but it is a sizable town, Skinny."

"I should say so!" Skinny agreed. "It is a heap bigger than I expected."

"Yes, it is quite a place, that's certain. Come now, my shadowy lieutenant, brace up and stiffen your back a little, and wipe that drop of sweat off your nose, and we'll ride into the metropolis in somethin' like style."

"Yes, and you stop talkin' and give your jaws a rest so's you'll be able to eat your dinner, if we're fortunate enough to get any."

"Don't fear on my account, partner," said Billy to that. "It will be a colder day than this when I can't eat my share."

"It's hopeful that we'll see a cooler day soon. But, say, what's the matter with the old dame ahead there?"

"Just what I am trying to get through my hair. Guess she's got the bats, or somethin' like it. She seems to be makin' signs to us."

"And by the motions she's makin' I'd say she means fer us to stop and turn back, wouldn't you?" Skinny ventured.

"It looks that way," Billy agreed, "but if that is what she does mean she can motion till she's deaf, dumb, blind and toothless, and it won't do any good. We have come to see the old town, and I have a notion that we'll stop long enough to take it in. But, sweet pertaters! that is what she means, sure as you live!"

The person in question was an aged woman. She was just ahead of them in the street upon which they had entered, and coming toward them, she was waving a crutch desperately, as if warning them to stop, and as she waved it, she hobbled to meet them as fast as she could, shouting.

"What seems to be the diffikilty, old lady?" Billy inquired, when they came near enough.

"Go back! go back!" she cried, in fairly good English. "In Santa Fe is only death for you."

She proved to be a hideous-looking old hag, probably a Mexican and Indian half-breed; was coarsely clad, and had a shawl over her head. Her back was bent and her hands were like claws.

"Just as likely as not," agreed Billy, coolly, "but you can't scare us off that way. The old fellow on the pale horse can't overtake us but once, that's certain, and I suppose it is as likely to occur here as anywhere else."

They had now stopped their horses.

"But you must go back," the old hag cried, still waving her crutch at them. "Mother Bruja makes no mistakes, and she knows there is danger here for you. Go back, go back!"

"Nary a go back," declared Billy, decisively. "We have tackled danger before, and we won't back out this time. But, seeing that you are so well posted, old lady, suppose you give us a hint what the danger is."

"Mebbe there is somethin' in it," observed Skinny, aside. "She looks enough like a witch."

"Can't help it if there is," answered Billy. "We are here, and we'll face the music. But let's hear what she has to say."

"Mother Bruja cannot be mistaken," the old woman declared again. "Mother Bruja has had a dream, and her dreams never fail."

"And I take it that you are Mother Bruja," put in Billy.

"Yes, yes, I am Mother Bruja. Once more I warn you, turn back."

"It can't be did, old lady," Billy declared. "We have come to stay a little while. But, tell us, what was your dream?"

"I saw you, brave American boy, coming up this street," the hag explained, "the same as I saw you a moment ago. I knew you at sight as the boy of my dream. And with you came a shadow—"

At this Billy broke into a loud, merry laugh. "She means you, Skinny, sure!" he cried.

"Don't you feel flattered? There is hope for you yet, for you see there is enough of you to dream about; ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you shut up," Skinny growled. "She didn't mean me at all. Let's hear what more she has to tell."

"If she didn't, she hit your case pat anyhow."

They turned again to the old woman, and she went on with what she had been on the point of telling.

"Yes, I saw you, brave boy, and with you a shadow," she declared. "And that shadow was the shadow of death—of death! Oh! if you value your life, go back, go back! Death awaits you here."

"Can't do it nobow," assured Billy. "I'm sure we feel a heap obliged to you for your kind interest in us, but I think we'll go on and see it out. If there's a difficulty a-brewin', I'd just as leave try a whack at it as not. We haven't had any excitement worth mentioning in several days now, and we're likely to die of chronic laziness if we don't get stirred up soon. But you haven't given us the hint I asked for. Where is this danger roosting?"

"Oh! why don't you heed my warning?" the old hag sighed despairingly. "You think I must be crazy, I suppose, and are making light of my words. I saw you coming into Santa Fe, full of life and health, just as I see you now, but the dark shadow of death was hovering over you, and even in my dream I felt a chill in my blood at the sight. Many and many such dreams have I had, and death always follows. And now that I meet you and recognize you as the very boys of my dream— Oh! be warned, and do not enter this city!"

The manner of the old woman was so impressive that the two lads became very sober-minded as they listened to her words.

"Don't you think we'd better steer clear of the town?" suggested Skinny.

"Couldn't think of it, my slender sapling," responded Billy. "Don't begin to croak till the danger looms up."

"I know, but see how straight her story is about the dream she had. How did she recognize us, if her story isn't straight? I tell you I feel shaky in my boots about it, Billy, and I don't deny it."

"Sort of a skeleton rattle as it were, eh?" Billy joked. "Well, you want to brace up and put some stiffness into your upper lip, for we are going on into the town, and there we're going to stop and stay for a little while, danger or no danger."

The old hag, upon hearing this decided avowal, turned away with a heavy sigh.

"Don't go off mad," cried Billy. "You haven't told us what you know about this danger."

The woman stopped and turned back. "I don't know what the danger is," she owned.

"And you can't tell us where to look for it, eh?"

"No, only that I know it is here in Santa Fe. I saw you ride into the city, in my dream, just as I see you now. The next I saw of you you were both lying over there in that gorge, dead—dead!"

Billy was strangely impressed. There was something about this old woman he could not understand.

Her language was good, showing that she must be educated in English, or had had unusual advantages in acquiring it.

And then her strange dream—what could he make of that? Simply nothing. There was the fact, as she had stated it, and he had no reason to think it was a lie.

"And what happened after that?" he asked, after a moment.

"I don't know," the old hag responded. "That was the end of my dream. The sight of you there, cold in death, shocked me and I awoke. It was such a sad change from the first sight I had had of you. Oh! turn back, I beg of you, if you value your lives. The first part of my dream has come true; the second is sure to

follow. Turn back, turn back, and do not enter another step into Santa Fe."

Billy shook his head.

"Not ter be thought of," he said, carelessly. "We'll go on, if it takes a leg. But are you a fortune-teller, or something of that sort?"

"I am a witch, if you want to believe what everybody will tell you. Mother Bruja has had more dreams than one that has come true. And those who know me best give most heed to my warnings. Oh, for the last time, I beg you to turn back. You are too young to die."

"And too beautiful, too," added Billy. "But I can't think of turning back at this late hour. We will go on and take our chances. By the way, where do you live, old lady, in case we should want to see you before we go away? If we don't meet the terrible fate you dreamed about, we will drop around and let you know. But we can't turn back; oh, no, not any."

CHAPTER II.

BILLY'S DETECTIVE FEVER COMES.

THE old hag made no answer.

With bowed head she went on her way.

Billy and Skinny looked at each other questioningly.

"Well, my gay and festive toothpick, what do you think about it?" demanded Billy.

"I don't think that it's any matter to make fun about, for one thing," was the grave response. "It may not be much of a joke before we get done with it."

"A joke! Why, bless your innocent little heart, Skinny, I should think not. Not much of a joke about being found dead over there in that gorge, I should say. Or if it was a joke, we wouldn't be able to see the point. Bless you, no. I don't look at it in that light, nary a time. But what else do you think about it?"

"Well, I think the quicker you stop your foolin' and begin ter talk sense, the better, that's one thing. You are makin' fun over somethin' that is ter my way of thinkin', mighty serious. It hits me that we had better take the old dame's advice and go right along to some other camp. There must be somethin' to her dreamin', or she wouldn't took on as she did."

"I don't deny that," answered Billy, "but her dream wasn't full enough ter satisfy my curiosity. S'pose we do go back, and get laid out on the way and left dead, wouldn't that bring her dream true jest the same? Oh, no: we'll go on and face the music, if it takes a leg off. That is the sort of a chicken-hearted peeper I am, my gay and festive whalebone, and if the old lady's dream comes true we won't live to lament our mistake. Come along, my croaking lieutenant."

With that, and a final glance at the old hag who was still hobbling along without looking back, Billy started forward.

Skinny started too, but continued to complain against his headstrong partner until they were well into the town.

"Well, here we are, Skinny," Billy at length observed, "and this looks like a pretty good hotel. Guess we'll stop here."

"Just as you say," agreed Skinny. "We may as well die in one place as another, I suppose."

"Don't see as it makes much difference," laughed Billy.

They rode to a curb and dismounted, and Billy spoke greeting to the group of men who stood around.

"How are ye, citizens?" he exclaimed, with the genuine broad touch of accent peculiar to the region. "Able to close ther lid of yer locker over yer grub, I opine. Any chance heur fer two weary pilgrims to roost and rest?"

One of the men on the piazza happened to be the proprietor of the hotel.

"Yes, you bet," he answered. "That's what I'm here fer. Want yer critters stabled, I opine."

"Yes, and the best care taken of them," assured Billy. "We think as much of our horses as we do of ourselves, almost. We want to stop a few days, and we have 'got the rocks to foot our bill."

"All right, no doubt about that, to jedge by yer appear. Ponto," to a half-breed who stood near, "take the critters to the stable and give 'em good care."

"And here's something to remind you of the kind of good care I mean," added Billy, tossing the fellow a coin.

The half-breed caught the coin and went off with a grin.

Billy and Skinny went into the house.

When they had made their terms with the landlord, they sat down to rest.

In a few minutes the landlord joined them,

eager to know where they had come from, and to get what news he could out of them.

Billy entertained him, telling him a straight story, answering all his questions. And when the landlord's curiosity had been in a measure satisfied, then Billy set out to question him.

"Is there an old woman around here called Mother Bruja?" he asked.

The landlord looked at him in quick surprise. "What do you want with her?" he demanded.

"Which is the same as saying there is such a person living here," Billy passed over. "Who and what is she?"

"Well, she's an old hag who lives hear in Santa Fe. Some folks calls her a witch. I don't know much about her, only from what I've heard. They say she has an eye to future things."

"Sort of a prophetess, eh?"

"Wal, yes, something like that, I reckon."

"Where does she live?"

"In a little hut on the north side of the town."

"Does anybody put any faith in her dreams or visions, or whatever she calls them?"

"You bet. You kin find men right hear in Santa Fe who will swear by Mother Bruja, every time. She's a quare old critter."

"I simply asked because I wanted to know," explained Billy. "We met her as we were riding into town, and she made herself known to us and warned us that we had better turn tail-to and slope off somewhere else."

"She told ye that!" the landlord exclaimed.

"Yes; said she'd dreamed about us, and thought there was danger here."

The landlord looked troubled.

"If she told ye that, young fellers," he spoke, "you want ter keep yer eyes open, as 'most anybody around hear will tell yer."

With that he went off, being called away, and the two lads were left to themselves.

"I'm afraid we're in fer it, Billy," remarked Skinny.

"It looks that way, thin one, and that's the fact," agreed Billy. "But we have been in for it before in our brief careers, and we are still able to take our rations."

"I wonder what the danger can be."

"And I give it up. That is what is troubling me at present, and I feel just like I do when there's an attack of the fever coming on. Wouldn't be surprised if it took hold of me before long."

"That's jest it, I'll bet. That's what is going to make all the trouble. I s'pose you'll go to pokin' your nose somewheres where you have got no business ter poke it, and you'll git killed fer your pains. I won't draw a full breath till I kin see ye safe back in New York again."

"Then you are destined to go around on half rations of air fer some time ter come," laughed Billy.

While they were thus talking, a man entered the bar-room and proceeded to tack a notice up on the wall.

The lads were interested in this, and the more so when they caught sight of the word "Reward."

"Somebody or somethin' has got lost, strayed or stolen," observed Billy.

"Let's see what it is, anyhow," suggested Skinny.

Several others in the room had stepped up to learn what the notice was, and the lads joined them.

In a moment more it was in place on the wall, and the man stepped down and away from it.

It read as follows:

REWARD.

"A reward of one thousand dollars will be paid for the detection and arrest of the robbers of the Traders' National Bank."

A. SINGERLAND, President."

Billy immediately gave Skinny a playful poke in the ribs, at the same time jerking his thumb toward the notice.

"That's our cheese, pard," he whispered.

Skinny looked alarmed.

"You don't mean ter try fer it, do ye?" he asked.

"Sure as yer skin covers yer bones, little one," Billy assured. "Can't let a chance like this slip by."

"It may bring about the truth of that old woman's dream."

"Can't help it if it does. No use talking to me now, fer the fever is ragin' hard. But, let's keep our ears open here, and hear what's said."

"So old Amzi is goin' fer 'em, is he?" the landlord was saying.

"Yes, and with a sharp stick, too," answered

the man who had posted the notice. "He means to find 'em if he can."

"That's all right, but the chances is they have skipped out long ago. It was done two nights ago, you know."

"Yes, I know it was, but he was waiting for the bank detective to do something, you know, and so lost time. That feller hasn't got a clew yet."

"Sort o' funny, too, fer Downsley seems ter be a smart sort of feller, ter my way of thinkin'."

"Right you are, in that. It is mighty strange. The robbers were no beginners."

"No, I bet they wasn't. It was a slick job, an' I don't believe they will be ketched."

The man who had put up the notice now went out, having more of them under his arm to put up elsewhere, and Billy turned his attention to the landlord, to learn more about the affair.

"What's all this about?" he questioned. "Been a bank robbery, I take it, by the general drift of what I heard."

"Yas, that's what it was," the landlord affirmed, "and a strange one, too. It was the Traders' National. It was broke into night afore last, and cleaned out of all its ready cash as slick and clean as a whistle."

"And there's no clew to who did it, eh?"

"Nary a one, as you heard said. It is a puzzle that Santa Fe is strugglin' with at present."

"Who is this fellow who put up the notice?"

"His name is Job Muller. He is a sort of handy-man-in-general about the bank, or was, afore it shut down."

"Then the bank has suspended?"

"Yes, it's shut up tight. It was skinned right out."

"Well, this is quite a sensation. You said it was broken into, I believe. It must have been the work of genuine burglars."

"Yes, you'd think so, but the funny thing about it is that the safe was unlocked instead of bein' bu'sted open. The fellers must have had a key to it."

"That is the way it looks, sure enough," Billy agreed. "But, where is this bank? We'll take a walk out and satisfy our curiosity by lookin' at it, while we wait for supper-time."

"The landlord gave them the desired information, and they went forth."

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "I feel tickled all over, Skinny, at the prospect for a little detective excitement. Now is the time for us to get right up on our muscle and show the folks what we can do. If we don't drag out these measly robbers and show them up, it will be because we have lost our grip, that's all."

CHAPTER III.

PICKING UP POINTS.

SKINNY was troubled.

And the cause of it all was Billy.

He saw danger ahead, and feared that Billy would come to grief.

Of course it was the warning of the old woman that was back of it all, and the solicitude of the lean lieutenant was great.

"Billy," he remonstrated, as they went along, "I hope you won't have nothin' to do with this bank robbery business. Somethin' tells me that there is danger in it, an' I'm afraid you'll get laid out."

"There, now, croaker," Billy chided, "just wring out that saturated blanket of yours and hang it up to dry. You are not goin' ter envelop me in its chilling folds, you bet. It is that old woman's story that has unhinged your nerves, and you must shake it out of your mind."

"That is easier said than done," Skinny responded to that. "I tell you that old hag's dream does stick in my crop, Billy, and I can't get it out. If there is any truth in it, you are takin' jest th' very course to git into trouble. Why can't you let detective work alone fer jest this once? You will get a clip over the head that will put an end to you, the old woman's dream will come true, and then where will I be? I tell you you had better drop out before you get in."

"No use, Skinny, no use at all. You might talk till yer teeth drop out, and ye couldn't turn me. I'm goin' inter this thing, and I'm goin' in ter win, you bet. An' I hope the fever will soon take hold of you, too, for we are a team when we both get it together. That old dame's tale can't scare me off, not even a little bit, and if it is destined to come true I reckon it will come true anyhow, without any help on our part. So now don't croak any more, but jest buckle on yer armor and wade in with me to show this bank detective how to do it."

"Talk is cheap," grumbled Skinny. "Ter

hear you, one would think you are a never-fail detective. One of these days you will get left so bad that you will go out and bury yourself. You'll go into this case puffed up like a big bubble, and you'll come out as flat as a pancake, and mebbey dead, too."

"All right, my gay and festive penny-weight, we'll see about that. All I ask of you is to stand by me. But no need to mention that, for I know you are as true as steel, and just about as tough, too."

And so they wrangled and disputed as they went along, at the same time taking in the sights of the city, and finally they reached the closed bank.

The doors and windows of the building were shut tight, and there was a notice on the door to the effect that the bank would remain closed for ten days. Also another setting forth the offered reward.

"The robbers must have unhinged the concern pretty bad," observed Billy.

"I should say so," Skinny agreed. "Can't open till they get hold of another boodle, I take it."

There was quite a number of persons in front of the rifled bank, some of them in earnest conversation.

One man, a man of about fifty years of age, was loud in his remarks.

"I tell you it's a big swindle!" he emphatically declared.

"Do you mean to say you don't believe it was a robbery at all?" another demanded.

"It must have been a robbery, or the money would be there," the first speaker retorted, "but it is mighty strange how that safe could be opened without forcing it. I can't understand it."

"But what do you mean by saying it is a big swindle?" hotly demanded a young man, pushing forward.

"I'll tell you what I mean, Walt Singerland," was the return shot, "I mean that somebody in that concern must have left the safe open on purpose."

The young man became white and red in turns, and his fists clinched in a very nervous manner.

"If you were not an older man than I am, Mr. Moreway," he grated, "I would strike you to the ground. What you say casts reflection upon my father and me. I will not stand that. You must take your words back, or—"

He did not finish the threat.

"I take nothing back, sir," the elderly gentleman stormed. "You and your father were not the only ones in the bank. No one else there, though, was supposed to have a key to the safe."

"No one else had one, to my knowledge," the young man boldly declared. "For that reason I take up your insinuation and demand that you take back what you have uttered."

"And you may demand till you are blind. When you show me how that safe was opened, then I'll get down in the dirt and grovel, but not before you do. Other men, as good as you and your father seem to be, have been found out to be precious rascals, and who can say that you are any better?"

The young man—and he was a good-looking, muscular fellow, about twenty-six years old—the young man sprung forward, with his arm uplifted, to strike the traducer to the ground.

But another man stepped quickly in front of him, caught his arm, and exclaimed:

"Don't, Walt! don't strike Mr. Moreway. He is hardly to be held to account for what he says. You know his loss by the robbery is mighty big. Don't boil over at what he says."

"Let him keep still then till he knows what he is talking about," the young man cried. "I know that I am innocent of any part in the robbery, and I will not hear my father's name mixed up in it. You want to be careful how you talk, Mr. Moreway, or I can't restrain myself."

The young man had lowered his arm and stepped back, as if ashamed of what he had been about to do.

"Well, then, show me the proof," the elder man demanded. "I want to know how that safe was opened, and I want to see the robber brought to account. I do not mean to lose my deposit without a fight, that I tell you."

With that he turned quickly and walked off.

"I could choke him with a good will," young Singerland muttered, as he looked after him. "He had no business to speak out as he did, even if he thought as he does. I swear to you, my friends, that I am as innocent as a babe of any part in this matter, and I can say the same for my father. You know how he feels about it. He is almost down sick."

"Oh, we don't believe you had anything to do

with it," two or three quickly exclaimed. "But it is a strange case, none the less, and we want to see it settled, even if the robbers don't get bagged."

"And our man Downsley is doing all he can," the young man assured. "But he can't seem to strike a clew anywhere."

"But your father's offer of reward may bring something to light."

"So we hope. Does not that offer, which my father makes upon his own responsibility, speak his innocence?"

"Of course! Of course!"

So exclaimed half a dozen or more in the crowd.

Broadway Billy, though, gave Skinny a nudge, and remarked in a low tone:

"He's said somethin' now, thin one, that drops him to zero in my estimation. Did you ketch on to it?"

"What was it?" Skinny inquired.

"Why, callin' attention to the offer of a reward as a proof of innocence. It may be all right, but it hits me hard that it ain't. What do you think about it?"

"I think there's nothin' in it," was Skinny's opinion. "This feller looks like a good straight chap."

"I know he does, but he may be a bad and crooked one. Now jest suppose the case. S'pose he or his dad or both of 'em robbed the big box, wouldn't it be jest th' natural thing fer 'em ter do ter put up a reward?"

"Well, yes, I don't know but you're right."

"Jest like the pickpocket who grabs your tucker and then hollers with the crowd while his partner does the running."

"But what made you drop to him so quick?" Skinny inquired, still a little in the dark.

"Why, didn't I jest explain?" Billy made answer. "Your brain must be sufferin' th' general effect of your constitutional thinness. When he called attention to that reward, as he did, it struck me that he wanted that to fill the eyes of folks so that they wouldn't be able ter see anything else; that's all."

"And from that you figger that this feller or his dad is the one who stole the plum, eh?"

"It strikes me that it won't do any harm ter give 'em a little attention, anyhow, and see how they pan."

"Well, go ahead, it's your funeral."

"You mean it will be, if that old hag's dream comes true."

"There, you bring that all back to mind. I wish you hadn't done it. That is a thing that troubles me."

"Never mind, lean one, there's a good deal of life in me yet, and if my usual run of good luck sticks to me, I am worth a dozen dead men. Try to hold back your briny tears, anyhow, Skinny till they are called for."

Skinny looked disgusted, to think Billy could joke in the face of what was to him a serious danger, and turned away.

Billy laughed to himself, but there was in his mind a haunting recollection of the warning.

Meantime, the talk among the men was going on.

"But, Walt, what is your theory about it?" one man asked.

"I haven't any theory at all," the young man answered. "I know I locked the safe that night, as usual. Next morning it was open and robbed. My key was not out of my possession all night, and father says his wasn't."

"Then do you think it was a duplicate key?"

"I don't know. It would seem so, but I don't see how a duplicate key was made, do you?"

"No, it is away beyond me. But the fact is there. Hello! here comes your detective."

Billy and Skinny looked in the direction he indicated.

They saw a man approaching, a man about forty years old, dark, keen-eyed and of nervous quickness of movement.

In a moment he had joined the group, and with only a nod to the others, laid a hand on young Singerland's arm and drew him aside.

Nobody heard what he said, but the effect of his words upon the young man was marked. He stopped short, turned pale, and glared hard at the detective for a moment before he spoke.

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY SCRAPES ACQUAINTANCE.

"You can't mean it!"

So the young man presently gasped.

The detective responded, at some length, in low tone.

"You are wrong—wrong!" young Singerland cried. "I will not believe it if he tells me so himself!"

"What do you say to this, then?" the detective

asked—and Billy had stepped close enough to hear; and he took a bill from his pocket and held it under the young man's eyes.

Walter Singerland, the cashier of the robbed bank, turned even more pale than before, and stepped back, looking the detective full in the face.

The group around them drew nearer with intent interest.

No one took more than passing notice of Billy and Skinny. Fellows of their present appearance were no unusual sight at Santa Fe.

"I—I can say nothing to it," the young cashier said, slowly. "It is something I cannot explain. But, say nothing about it, yet."

"Very well, I will keep it close for the present. I only wanted to let you know how the case looks. This is the first clew I have picked up, and as you were hot against me for not finding one sooner, I thought I would show you this at once."

With that the detective thrust the bill back into his pocket, and walked away up the street.

The two New York lads looked at each other. Billy's suspicion was strengthened and Skinny shared it.

To be sure they had not overheard much, but enough to show them that the detective had startled the cashier not a little with some discovery he had made.

"It's crackers ter cheese that the detective has got the bulge on it," remarked Billy, "and it's cheese to crackers that this fellow Singerland is in for it in some fashion or other."

"And I'll bet you're right," supported Skinny. "Tickle me with a club if I ain't beginnin' ter feel interested in it myself, Billy."

"Glad to hear it. But let's hold our chin and see what more we can pick up here."

The group was now pressing around the cashier, eager to hear what he would say, they having demanded to know what the discovery was.

"No, no, I can't tell you what it is," he refused. "The detective has picked up what he thinks is a clew, but it don't seem possible to me that it can be what he thinks it is. Anyhow, no mention can be made of it till he looks into it further."

"But we have a right to know," one man demanded. "I am interested in this thing to the tune of ten thousand dollars, and I demand an explanation, Walt."

"No, no," the young man still held out, "I can't give it—I won't give it. It might hurt the case if it got out before the detective is done with it. No, I will not say what it is, and that settles it. Go right to Downsley himself, and if he can tell you no doubt he will."

"But, dast it, Walt, it was you that told him to keep it still!" the man exclaimed.

"Well, I am not prepared to say anything now, anyhow," the young man declared finally. With that he pushed his way out of the group and went off.

The other men looked after him in a wondering way, and presently one of them remarked: "Somethin' has cut Walt Singerland up, that's certain."

"Yes," another agreed, "that detective has found out somethin' that he don't relish much."

"But you don't suppose that Walt or his dad had anything ter do with ther robbery, do yer?" another put in.

"Oh, no, not at all," the first speaker assured.

"They ain't that sort o' men. What it is I can't guess, unless the clew points to some friend of theirs."

"Yes, it may be that. No use thinkin' it was Walt or the old man. They ain't that sort. Mr. Moreway was altogether too hasty in what he said, too. But he don't believe it of 'em, I'm sure."

In this manner their talk ran on for some minutes, and presently the group broke up and the men separated.

Billy and Skinny were left there alone, with the exception of an old negro who was seated on the bank steps.

Persons were passing along, in both directions, of course, but these did not count in the exception.

"Well, Lieutenant Skinny, what is yer private think?" asked Billy.

"Don't know what ter think," answered the lean lieutenant.

"Do ye believe the Singerlands had anything ter do with the robbery?"

"No, I don't—that is to say, not the young man. Haven't seen the old one yet."

"Well, that's where we don't agree, fer it sticks in my throat that they know more about it than any one is aware of. But this is only guess-work, you know. We must get at the bottom facts of the case."

"We will attend to gettin' at the bottom of some supper first, I am thinking. I am as empty as a base-drum."

"Ha, ha, ha! As empty as a base-drum—you! Well, now, that's a good one. The idea of comparing your inward capacity to that of a base-drum. Now if you had said as empty as a piccolo, there would have been—"

"Oh! you shut up," Skinny snapped. "I said empty as a base-drum, and that's what I mean. If you have lost your appetite I haven't."

"Truth is, Skinny, my tender peony, I had forgot all about being hungry. I seldom think of that when the detective fever gets hold of me strong. But, as you say, I suppose it will be just as well to go into this thing on a full stomach, and then if that old hag's dream comes true we'll go off with a full—"

"If I couldn't talk sense when I opened my mouth," snapped Skinny, "I'd keep it shut altogether."

"Jest so," returned Billy. "That's why most of the talking falls to me. I have to wag my jaw for both of us. But, say, I'm goin' ter buzz this colored gentleman here on the steps. It strikes me that he belongs to the bank."

"Do it if you want to, but if he feels like I do he'll kick ye out into the middle of the road."

"No danger of that, I guess. I know you feel out o' sorts, slender one, but you will come around all right when ye have had yer feed. Here goes fer the dark."

With that Billy strode forward to the steps and laid his hand on the negro's shoulder.

"What are you pining away over?" he good-naturedly asked.

The colored individual looked up.

He was a man of fifty or so, and his face was sad in expression.

"Yo' go right 'long, now," he ordered, waving his hand. "I don't feel like takin' no foolin', I don't."

"Bless your honest old soul, uncle," assured Billy, "I haven't the least intention of fooling with you. I wouldn't trifle with yer feelings fer anything, and you lookin' so sad and down-in-the-mouth."

"What yo' want then? I has had my eye on yo', I has, an' I has seen you two fellers laughin' an' snickerin', I has."

"Do you mean to tell me you could see that shadder over there?" cried Billy, jerking his thumb toward Skinny.

"Why, shua; why not?"

"Then, there is nothin' the matter with your eyesight, uncle, and that's the fact. If you can see that blade o' grass at that distance, you can see anything. But, say, what has happened to the bank? They was talkin' around that it has been robbed. I take it you belong to the institution, don't you?"

"Yes, sah, I 'longs heah, I does. Yes, it hab been robbed, clean out, an' nobody knows who done it."

Billy had taken a seat on the step beside the darky, now, in a very friendly manner.

"And it happened night before last."

"Yes, sah."

"Well, it was lucky for me that I hadn't made a deposit there."

"Yes, hit was dat, if yo' was goin' ter do it. But, we is goin' ter open up ergain in a few days."

Billy had to smile at the "we" part of the remark. The darky was evidently employed to clean windows and sweep the floor, etc.

"What office do you hold in the concern?" he asked.

"Oh, I is de office-man, sah."

"Oh, I see. But, say, tell me a. about it, will you? You see, if it is all straight and no tricks about it, I may make my deposit anyhow, when you reopen."

"Yo' hab just come inter San' Fe, I takes hit."

"Yes; haven't been here an' hour."

"I thought so. You would know all about hit if you had been heah any longer. Everybody knows all erbout hit."

"Yes, so it seems, and I want to be as wise as the rest of folks, you see."

At this the colored man laughed in a half-hearted way.

Billy was gaining ground in his esteem, as he never failed to do when he set about it.

"Well, I'll done to' ye all erbout it," he agreed. "Hit happened night 'fo' last, as yo' knows. De bank wa' closed up as usual at de quittin' hour, an' eberything made right. Yes—day mawnin', though, when I don't come heah ter open up, de front doah war bu'sted into, and de safe war open wide, an' all de money token out ob hit. Bet yo' life I war skart."

"And you gave the alarm at once, of course."

"Yo' jes' bet I did."

"You say the front door had been broken open?"
 "Yes, sah."
 "How had it been done?"
 "Some strong thing had been pushed 'tween de crack, an' de lock pried open so's hit don't slipped de socket."
 "But nothin' of the kind had been done to the safe, eh?"
 "No; da' wa'n't a mark ob any kind on hit."
 "Well, it is strange, truly. But, say, Pompey—"

"Hol' on dar, sah; my name am Samuel Washington."
 "Beg yer pardon, Samuel. But, say, do you believe there is any truth in what that man hinted at awhile ago—that the president or cashier may have had a hand in it?"
 The colored individual straightened up with dignity.
 "No, sah!" he exclaimed. "No, sah! Mistah Moreway am clean gone mistaken, sah. Mistah Singerland and Walter am two of de mos' honest gentlemen what lib, sah, an' dat I's tellin' yo'."

CHAPTER V.

THE SUSPICION STRENGTHENED.

BILLY had a long talk with the darky. It was by far too long to be quoted here, though it might be of interest.
 The young detective "let himself loose" with a good many of his quaint sayings, and at times the amused darky had to hold his sides.
 What Billy learned may be summed up in a short space. Amzi Singerland, the president of the bank, was a man sixty years old. He had one son, Walter, who was cashier; and a daughter named Rosamond. The daughter was about twenty years old, and one of the belles of Santa Fe.

Singerland and his son, according to the darky's estimate, were men of excellent repute. Honest and honorable, they were men much admired, and their word was considered as good as their bond. The daughter had suitors many, of whom one Kenward Whiteheath was the favored. He was a young man, about the age of Walter Singerland, engaged in mercantile business and making money. He and Walter were close friends and companions.

Henry Moreway, he learned, was a man of considerable wealth, who had been in Santa Fe some months, boarding at the same hotel where Billy and Skinny had put up. He was a gentleman in every way, in the darky's mind, and had had quite a big deposit in the bank. Downsley, the detective, had been in the employ of the bank for some time, and was well liked and considered honest and faithful. The darky did not know where he had come from. There was no suspicion against any one respecting the robbery. No suspicious-looking persons had been around before it was committed. In short, the whole thing was a mystery, pure and simple.

These points and a good many more Billy stored away for future reference, and finally taking leave of the darky, he and Skinny went back to the hotel.

"Tell yer what it is, Skinny," he said on the way, "there is a crooked stick in this pile somewhere, and I mean to hunt it out."

"And get yer back broke with it fer yer pains," grumbled Skinny. "You would do better to drop the whole thing. It ain't none of your business, anyhow."

"Ain't none of my business! Sweet pertaters! I'd like ter know whose business it is, then. Here's a reward of a clean thousand offered, and if William o' Broadway ain't got a right ter try fer it I'd like ter know who has?"

"Yes, and come cut dead, and then what good will the thousand do ye?"

"You will find it is no use your croakin' that way, my gay an' festive splinter. I am into the case already, clear up to my ears, and the best thing you can do is to peel off your coat and come in with me. If we don't make Santa Fe dizzy, it will be a caution."

Skinny continued to mutter something, but not in outspoken words.

"Yes, sir-ee, I'm goin' inter it, tooth and nail," Billy went right on. "I tell ye, Skinny, there is fun ahead fer you an' me, and we have got ter get it. What will yer tune be when we scoop that thousand, and I hand over your half of it? Why, ye will swell so with pride that you'll tip the beam an ounce heavier than ye ever did in yer life."

"You seem ter fergit that old woman's dream."

"Oh, no, not at all. I remember it well enough, but I am not going to let it worry me any. Now, Skinny, lend your ear to my rattle

while I sift my ideas and get 'em straightened out so's I can handle 'em. Here's a bank been robbed. Nobody knows who did it. One man throws a hint out against the president and cashier. It cuts up the young cashier considerably. Then along comes the detective of the institution and cuts him up a good deal more. Somehow it sticks in my crop that the cashier had a hand in it, though I can't say just why."

"No, I don't believe you can."
 "Well, but don't it look so?"
 "I don't care how it looks, I'll bet on his innocence."

"And how about the old man, his father?"
 "Don't know nothin' about him. That young feller, though, has a face that I kin trust. I'd trust him with my pocketbook anywhere."

"It don't do ter go accordin' ter looks, in all cases, Skinny, my little pippin. If I had been judged accordin' to my looks I'd been hanged long ago. No, that don't do. But, we'll see what's what afore we are done with this thing. I'm goin' in ter win, jest as soon as I fill up my inner gentleman."

Billy had a starting point in mind. He intended to open his campaign with an interview with Mr. Moreway.

About the time they reached the hotel supper was ready, and they went immediately to the dining-room.

There were quite a number of persons present at the table, and among them was Henry Moreway, the man whom Billy had in mind.

Seated opposite to him was a fine-looking young man, and when Billy heard him addressed as Kenward he jumped at once to the conclusion that it must be the Kenward Whiteheath the darky had mentioned.

He was not mistaken in his guess, for it was that personage.

For some time the talk was general. Billy and his partner took no part in it, for Billy desired to learn all he could from what others had to say, and did not want to draw any attention to himself.

Another who was present at the board was the detective, Downsley.

"By the way," young Whiteheath presently spoke up, "anything new regarding the bank robbery?"

His remark was more to Mr. Moreway than to any one else.

"No, nothing new," that gentleman snapped, "and I'm afraid there never will be. It's the slowest case I ever heard of."

"A case has to be slow, sir," spoke up the detective, "till there is a clew to work upon."

"And a case that is a case ought to furnish a clew," was the rejoinder.

"Then you have discovered nothing, Mr. Downsley?" interrogated Whiteheath, turning to him.

"Well, no, or that is—nothing of importance yet."

"You speak as though you had something of a clew."

"Something that may prove to be a clew, sir."

"Well, that is encouraging, anyhow."

"It will be encouraging when we see the whole thing exposed," grumbled Mr. Moreway.

"You are sore-headed over your loss, I see, sir," observed Whiteheath, smiling. "But, you are not to be blamed for that. A cool ten thousand is not to be picked up in a day, generally."

"It is not so much that," Moreway answered, "but there is a sticker in my mind that everything is not straight in that institution. It will be a satisfaction for me to see the president and cashier come out with clean hands."

Whiteheath grew slightly pale.

"You don't dare to insinuate that you think Mr. Singerland or Walt had a hand in it, do you?" he demanded.

"I insinuate nothing," was the retort. "I want to know how that safe was opened as it was, that's all."

"By heavens!" the young man cried, "but I can't sit still and hear this manner of charge made against my friends. Why, I would as soon believe myself guilty of the crime."

Billy had his ears open and his eyes well about him.

Looking at the detective, he imagined he saw a smile play around his mouth.

"I don't say they are guilty," Mr. Moreway urged, "but what I do say is, that it is more than strange how that safe was opened, when only they have keys and know how to open it. Make out of that what you want to, sir."

"And I make out of it a clear insinuation that they know more about the crime than is supposed. If you think they do, sir, why don't you have them arrested? Otherwise, kindly keep

your thoughts to yourself. You have no right to slander their good names and excellent reputation."

Whiteheath was fully roused, now, and finished his supper in silence and in haste.

When he had left the room the detective observed:

"Mr. Whiteheath takes it keenly, on account of Miss Singerland, no doubt, but he had better not stand too strong in the defense of the old man."

"Why, what do you know?" demanded Mr. Moreway.

"Nothing that I can explain yet. The closer to the Singerlands I come, however, the warmer the trail seems to get."

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed Moreway. "By heavens, if I find they are the ones at the bottom of it, I'll send them higher than a kite!"

"Whether they are or not," the detective went on, "I am done with the institution as soon as I am out of this case. Young Singerland has abused me, almost, in his urging me in the matter."

Broadway Billy was keenly awake to everything.

And as he listened to what was said, he fell to reasoning the matter in his mind.

First, there was the impression he had formed against Walter Singerland, in respect to his having had something to do with the robbery.

Upon that were the outspoken hints of Mr. Moreway, who had the appearance of being a solid man, and one whose opinion was worth considering. And then to that was added the hint of the detective.

Little by little points had fixed themselves upon Billy's mind, till he was arrayed against the bank president and his son; something new, too, in his experience, for he generally required proof positive before taking sides in any such affair. He was as ready to work for them as against them, however, should anything lead him to change his opinion.

After supper he and Skinny returned to the bar-room, where they found Mr. Moreway in conversation with the detective.

Their talk lasted for some minutes, when the detective went away.

"Now," Billy observed to Skinny, "I'm going to tackle my man, and see what I can make out of him."

"You'd best not make yourself too numerous," warned the more slow-going partner. "Soon as you make yourself known, you are likely ter get into trouble. Remember the old witch's warning."

Billy smiled at that, and full of self-confidence stepped over to where Mr. Moreway was sitting.

Drawing up a chair, the young cowboy prince, as he had been lately dubbed, sat down with all the assurance of an old acquaintance.

Mr. Moreway looked at him keenly, and Billy met his gaze with his own cool and steady eyes. Neither spoke for a moment, but presently Billy took it upon himself to do so.

"I take it you are a solid, square-toed, upright and honest citizen of these United States, sir," he observed.

CHAPTER VI.

BILLY BUZZES MR. MOREWAY.

MR. MOREWAY smiled.

"You have got assurance," he remarked.

"Which is the next thing to spot cash, in these times," returned Billy.

"Well, what do you want, young man? I take it that you have something you want to say to me."

"You tap the nail right on the head, sir," Billy assured. "I want to talk with you about this bank robbery, if you don't object."

Mr. Moreway gave the youth a searching look. Billy noted it, and met it in his usual manner. He thought the gentleman must be wondering what he could have to do with that affair.

"I have no objections to talking about it, certainly," Mr. Moreway rejoined. "But how can it interest you? Did you have money there?"

"No, sir, I'm happy to say I hadn't," Billy answered. "What I am after is pointers. I want to try my hand at winning that reward."

"Oh-ho! that is it, eh?" and the gentleman eyed him with a new interest.

Skinny, sitting by himself at some distance away, was noting everything, although he could not overhear.

He imagined that at this point Mr. Moreway favored Billy with a look that was not altogether pleasant, though it was but a momentary expression.

"That is just my distress," Billy affirmed. "And as I understand you are a heavy loser, I

believe you will take enough interest in it to give me all the help you can. What do you say?"

"Well, you seem to have nerve enough for a detective, anyhow. Have you had any experience in that line? I took you and your companion to be cowboys."

"And so we are," assured Billy. "We have drifted over from Texas, where we spent half a year rounding up the long-horns. We are from New York, though, and there I have had a little experience at thief-catching."

Billy said this without any air of boasting.

He was stating simple facts, and he stated them in a matter-of-fact way.

Assured by his own impression of the man, and by all he had heard about him, that Mr. Moreway was a man of honor, he had no hesitancy about revealing himself.

There was no question in his mind but that a man who had lost ten thousand dollars through a robbery, would lend all the help possible toward bringing the robbers to justice.

And there was nothing the matter with that reasoning, either. Billy seldom made a mistake when he formed an estimate of a stranger.

"But you are a young man to be a detective," the man noted.

"I grew up in the biz," explained Billy. "I've been a detective ever since I could talk straight."

"There does not seem to be much brag in your talk, but can you prove what you assert?"

For answer to that, Billy unbuttoned his vest, threw it open, and displayed the badge that had been presented to him in San Francisco.

Mr. Moreway looked from the badge to the lad's face, and from the face to the badge, several times.

Then he read the wording upon the badge, greatly interested.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you are the person mentioned on this badge?"

"I'm the chap," Billy assured.

"And you are going into this matter to win that reward."

"Jest so, if my boots cleave to my feet, and the chances are they will. And when I go into a case I generally mean business, too."

"Give me your hand on it, then," exclaimed Mr. Moreway, and he offered his own. "I admire you, lad, and I hope you will win and bring the scoundrels to the reward they merit."

Billy gave his hand, and it was shaken heartily.

"And now what do you want me to tell you?" the gentleman asked.

"Everything you can about the affair."

"Good enough, I will do that. But, let us be guarded in our talk."

"No one will overhear us if we speak no louder, sir."

"I know, but it will do no harm to be cautious. You might injure your own chances, you know, were it known who you are."

"Well, we'll take care. Now, you are out ten thousand dollars by that robbery."

"About that sum, yes."

"And naturally you want to get it back, and see the robbers hauled up. Now, what is your suspicion about the affair?"

"I hardly know, my lad, what it is. You see, the outer door of the bank was forced, but not the safe. That was opened evidently with a key that fitted it exactly. Not a mark or scratch is on it anywhere."

"And it is that that has led you to suspect the Singers, one or both, is it?"

"Yes, that is it. It seems strange how any one else could have opened the safe so easily."

"Is there any one else that you might suspect? That is to say, any one who might have taken the money, with their help. It would be easy for them to leave the safe open, you know."

"So it would. Let me think a moment. There is one man who might have had a hand in it. Strange I had not thought of it before."

"And who is he?"

"He is a fellow called Half-breed Brown. I have seen young Singers in conversation with him at odd times."

"What sort of looking fellow is he? Where does he hang out?"

"He is a big, rough-looking man, with stubborn hair as straight as stubble, and as black as night. It is about three or four inches long, and stands out all over his head as stiff as bristles. You could know him by that without any further description, but he has a scar across his nose that is not to be mistaken. Looks as if his nose had been cut in two at some time or other. As to where he holds forth, you will very likely find him at the Black

Miner, a low saloon out on the edge of the town. It will be easy to find the place; any one can direct you."

"Have you seen this gentleman since the robbery?"

"No, come to think of it, I haven't. Do you know, I believe you have struck upon the right trail, young man."

"I hope so, anyhow," ventured Billy.

"There is this much about it, if Half-breed Brown did have anything to do with it, watching him will be sure to trap him."

"You say he makes the Black Miner his hanging-out place?"

"Yes; you ought to find him there in an hour or two from now. I have heard it said that he spends his evenings there. He is a sort of local loafer, not of much use to himself or anybody else, and generally half drunk."

"And you say Walter Singers had dealings with such a fellow as that?"

"Just as I told you."

"Which doesn't speak very well for him."

"I have mentioned this to no one else. Hadn't thought of it, you see. You have this clew all to yourself."

"And what about the bank detective, Downesley? Do you think he is on the same trail?"

"I hardly think so. But, what if he is? You may be able to beat him in the case. You win that reward, my boy, and I'll double it for you. I must recover my lost money, or it will place me in a bad way."

"I'll do the best I can, sir. As I told you, and I don't say it to brag, I have done such business before, and with good success."

"That badge you have proves it. Well, go in to win, and if I can be of any help to you, let me know."

Billy asked any number of questions, and finally left Mr. Moreway and rejoined Skinny.

"Who is his undertaker?" Skinny asked, soberly.

"Who is whose undertaker?" demanded Billy.

"Why, the man's, of course."

"How should I know. What are you driving at, anyhow, my gay and festive shadow of a hairpin?"

"I was only thinking that he had better be sent for, that's all. Didn't know but you meant to talk the man to death."

"Oh, now I ketch on, my beloved partner, now I ketch on. Why didn't you spit it out all in one lump? No danger of my talkin' him to death, I guess."

"Well, I hope you feel better, now that you have let out who you are, and I suppose you think you have made an impression, don't you? If you could have seen the pretty look he gave you as you turned away, you wouldn't think so."

"The pretty look he gave me? What do you mean by that?"

"Mean just what I say, of course. When you got up and turned this way he had his eye on you with an ugly look."

Billy laughed at that.

"You only imagined it, Skinny, that's sure," he declared. "You are so ugly yourself, tonight, that you see everything else in the same light. Why, he is one of the finest men I ever talked with."

"All right, you keep on thinkin' so. Put him an' Walt Singers up together fer choice, and I'd take Walt, every time."

"And I wouldn't, and that's the difference. That young fellow has a shady history, and I'm bettin' on it."

"I'll back his character against your man's, every time. But, say, let's take a little stroll about the town, and then go to roost."

"Nixey, McGinnis! I'll take the stroll, but you don't catch this duckling in bed till he has taken a squint around for a clew to that robbery. I have got my eye on a fellow that may have had somethin' to do with it."

"Jest what I was afraid of," Skinny complained.

"Afraid of what, my little bony bantam?"

"That you would take it into your head to go nosing around."

"Can't help it, the fever is on me and it must have its run, jest like a case o' measles."

"But who is the fellow you want to look after? You didn't mention it before. What put you onto him?"

"Didn't mention it, Skinny, cause I didn't know of it till I had pumped Mr. Moreway. I got it out of him. The man is a fellow they call Half-breed Brown. He is a local bad character, and your pet, Mr. Singers, was seen talkin' with him not over a moon or two ago."

"Well, I don't care if he was. You have talked with some of the very worst men in New

York, and that didn't make you any the worse, did it?"

"Do you mean that for a compliment? or am I to take it for an insult? Do you mean to insinuate that it is hard to spoil a bad egg? or that an angel is not to be injured by contamination? As you are so stuck on Singers, I take it you mean the last mentioned, and I thank you exceedingly much."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL GROWING HOT.

SKINNY gave a sniff of disgust.

"If it wasn't too much trouble," he declared,

"I'd kick you."

"Take my advice and don't do it," cautioned Billy, smiling. "Fat folks are liable to fatal results, if they over-exert themselves."

Quite a little more of the same manner of pleasantry was indulged in by both, Billy getting back about as good as he gave, and at last he called a halt, saying:

"There, there, my little man, don't go to saying harsh things about me, for I can't stand it, you know. Come, and we'll take that stroll you spoke about. When we get out and begin to see the sights, you'll feel better."

As Skinny had no desire to sit there, and had a greater desire not to lose sight of Billy, he agreed and they went out.

They had been a considerable time at supper, and had spent a great while in the bar-room since, and it was now night and the streets and shops, etc., were lighted up.

As they went from the room, Mr. Moreway rose and followed them.

On the piazza he laid a detaining hand on Billy's arm.

"You want to take care not to get into trouble, my young friend," he cautioned.

"There are bad places in Santa Fe, and bad people, too, as well as everywhere else in the world. Look out for them."

"Much obliged to you," Billy responded, "but I guess you need not worry about us. I hardly think you can show us any worse places than we have at home."

"Perhaps not, but I thought I would caution you. And, more, if you should discover what you are in search of, and need help, send right to me. And if you need money—"

"There, now, say no more," interrupted Billy.

"We have got some small change about our clothes, I guess. If I want help, though, I'll let you hear from me, post haste by telegraph."

"All right," rejoined Mr. Moreway, with a smile, "don't forget it."

With that he turned and went up the street, while Billy and Skinny set out in an opposite direction.

The lads strolled around for some time aimlessly, looking at whatever there was to be seen, and amusing themselves in innocent ways.

At last Billy came to a short stop.

"Well, we have had your little stroll now, Skinny, my gay and festive Cupid, and now we will come down to business. We'll pay a visit to the Black Miner."

"And who is the Black Miner?" Skinny asked.

Billy laughed.

"Not a person at all," he explained, "but a saloon that bears that name."

"And what will you go there for?"

"That's where Mr. Half-breed Brown hangs out."

"Oh, I see. Well, as you are determined, go ahead. Suppose I'll have to go along with you."

"Oh, to be sure. Couldn't think of going anywhere without taking my shadder with me. Come right along. We'll get there, Eli."

"But you don't know where it is, do you?"

"What's my tongue for? Hold on a second, and I'll ask this fellow."

A man was approaching, and when he came up Billy stopped him.

"Not wantin' to trouble you," he observed,

"but can you tell us where the Black Miner is?"

The man smiled.

"You are away off ther trail," he declared.

"It is on the other side of the town. Foller this street, though, till you git purty well out, and then anybody there kin show ye."

"All right, and much obliged," thanked Billy.

"Come along, skeleton, and we will pick our feet up one after the other till we find the place."

They set out upon the back track, as directed, passed the hotel, and continued right on till they were satisfied they had gone about far enough.

Stopping, Billy made further inquiry of the first person they encountered, and they were directed to their destination.

When they reached the doors of the Black

Miner they found that it was not a very desirable resort.

"I don't like the flavor of it at first blush, and that's a fact," Billy honestly declared.

"No, nor I don't, either," agreed Skinny. "I move we wheel face about, and make tracks for the hotel. Who seconds the motion?"

"No, you don't," cried Billy. "We have come so far, and we'll see it out now if it takes a leg. We'll go in, and I'll see if Mr. Half-breed Brown is here."

"How do you expect to know him when you see him?"

"By the descrip' Mr. Moreway gave me."

"Well, go ahead, if you are determined."

Billy entered boldly, and Skinny was right behind him.

There was nothing of fear in their movements, as there was nothing of it in their hearts.

Skinny, though, had a constant feeling of dread, as though something was going to happen. He could not get that old hag's warning out of his mind.

Billy's keen eyes took in the whole interior in a few seconds, and in the rear part of the room he saw a personage whom he instantly recognized as Half-breed Brown.

He was in conversation with another fellow about as evil-looking as himself, and both seemed to be deeply interested.

A bottle of vile stuff was on the table before them, and they held glasses in their hands.

Billy walked leisurely down the room, and took a seat at a table behind the pair, Skinny coming on after him and following his example.

Half-breed Brown and his companion seemed to take no notice of them, but went on with their talk.

The lads were no sooner seated than a waiter was at hand for their order.

Billy was in the mood for a set-to with him, but under the circumstances had no time for it, so he ordered cigars to get clear of him, though neither he nor Skinny ever smoked.

Having got clear of the waiter, the lads passed some words between themselves, idly, and then listened to the men behind them.

"But I tells yer it is ther fact," Half-breed Brown was insisting. "I have got ther sugar ter prove it."

"Then it was you what skinned the consarn, was it?"

"Bet your life on it, me and ther youngster tergether. Oh, we made a dizzy haul, and no mistake about that."

"And where have ye got your share of ther stuff hid?"

"Yer don't see nothin' green about me, do yer?" Half-breed Brown demanded.

"Well, no, can't say as I do," the other admitted. "But, come," he added, "don't be light on ther likker. It won't hurt ye, I bet. Fill up yer glass again, an' down with it. You are proof against pizen."

Half-breed Brown laughed at this, and gave it as his opinion that he was, and refilled his glass.

His companion did likewise, and wishing each other health, long life and prosperity, they drank the stuff down.

"Not much health, long life and prosperity in that stuff," Billy whispered to Skinny. "It's jest the opposite, every time. You'll never get any of it down my neck, you bet."

"No, nor down mine, either," echoed Skinny.

"That's one thing we agree on, anyhow, Billy."

"Right you are. But keep yer ears open, fer I reckon we'll hear somethin' afore we get done with these fellers."

"And you say ther young feller made it all right for ye, hey?" Half-breed's companion spoke.

"Yer kin bet he did. He left the safe onlocked so's all I had ter do was ter bu'st in ther outside door an' wade in."

"Well, you are a cool one, Half-breed, and no discount on you. Ter think that you had this on yer mind, and never told me a word about it."

"Why, I would been only too glad ter helped ye."

"Haw, haw, haw! I reckons yer would, too. But I was workin' on small enough shares as it was, and couldn't afford a pard. If I had been goin' it alone I'd taken yer in with me."

Billy nudged Skinny.

"What did I tell ye?" he demanded. "What do ye think of yer dashin' young cashier now?"

Skinny looked rather glum.

"I wouldn't 'a' believed it," he muttered.

"I'll never trust a good face again, unless it is backed up by a certificate of character."

"Which is a good resolution to stick to," Billy approved. "His face is good enough, but somehow I got set against him, and that settled his

case in my esteem. I couldn't help it. But, open yer ears now."

"Yer don't believe it!" Half-breed Brown had just exclaimed.

"No," asserted his companion, "I don't."

"An' why don't yer?"

"Cause, if you had robbed ther consarn ye would be more flush wi' ther rocks nor what ye be."

"Flush wi' ther rocks! an' a detective nosin' around? Oh, no, not any in mine, if you please. I'll keep it shady till ther thing quiets down."

"That's a good story, but I don't believe it all ther same. I won't believe it till I see it with me own eyes. And, by ther same token, I'd be mighty glad ter borrar some of it."

"See heur, Cross-grain Jake," cried Half-breed, "Did yer ever know me to lie to yer?"

"No, not as I knows on," was the answer, "but I'm afraid that's what ye are doin' now jest ther same."

"And I tell yer I ain't."

"Yer will have ter prove it."

"An' how d'ye want me ter prove it?"

"Take me to ther place whar yer boodle are hid."

"Will yer give me a square deal if I do? Won't try ter rob me?"

"Wouldn't rob ye of a cent, on me word. All I ask is ther loan of a hundred for a time."

"All right, I'll do it. Don't want yer to think that I would lie to yer. I will take ye there, in about a couple o' hours, soon's it is safe ter go, an' I'll lend ye th' hundred, too."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN A DESPERATE DILEMMA NOW.

It was a bargain, and the two rascals shook hands.

They talked on, but nothing more of such immediate importance was said.

Finally Billy and Skinny got up and left the saloon, with all the careless coolness they had shown upon entering.

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, as soon as they were well away from the den, "don't it beat the hob-nailed Dutch? Who would 'a' thought we'd get onto it so soo?"

"But you ain't done with it yet," reminded Skinny. "It is one thing to get the right clew, and it is another to foller it up. You want ter keep per eye peeled all th' time, and not fergit that old woman's warnin'."

"I'll soon begin ter think that you are an old woman yourself, if you keep on croakin' about that."

"I can't help it. It sticks in my throat, and I can't cough it up and it won't go down. What am I going to do about it?"

"Well, take care that it don't choke you then; that's the best advice I can give for your desperate case. But, say, do you know what I'm going to do?"

"I think I can guess."

"Well, what?"

"You are goin' ter lay around and shadder these two fellers when they come out of the saloon."

"Right you are, my gay and festive little gosling."

"I thought so. It wouldn't be you if you didn't. But, say, did you notice the way they were pouring down that rotten rum? I bet a dose of it would kill you or me."

"I reckon it would, pard, but you can bet it never will," responded Billy.

"And it is a wonder it don't kill them, too."

"It will, in time."

"I can't see what they like about it, can you?"

"Well, Skinny, as good old Uncle Abe Lincoln once remarked—For men who like that kind of thing, that is about the kind of thing they like. And they're welcome to swim in it, if they want to, for all I care. So speaketh the oracle."

They walked a little distance from the saloon, and there stopped to wait and watch.

It was pretty certain, they believed, that the two rascals would keep the agreement they had made, and they meant to be on hand.

Skinny, too, was now waking up to the importance of the case, though he did not like to let on that he was much interested in it. Billy would have the laugh on him if he did.

They had quite a long time to wait, almost the whole of the time specified by Half-breed Brown, but at last that worthy made his appearance from the saloon, followed by his rascally companion, Cross-grain Jake.

Once outside the door of the den, they stopped and looked around for a few moments, and then they set off out of town.

Billy and Skinny went after them, keeping well in the shadows, and using all caution.

They had no thought that they would be discovered, for they were silent as the shadows around them, almost; and even if they were detected, they were armed and knew how to use their weapons.

They allowed the two rascals to keep some distance ahead of them, and in this manner they all proceeded until they were finally out of the town, and the last of the lights had been left behind them.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy muttered, "I wonder if they are going right on out of the territory?"

"It seems to me Brown went off far enough to hide his swag, anyhow," complained the lean lieutenant.

A little further on they came to a very dark place.

Here was an old adobe hut, evidently unoccupied, with trees all around.

When they came to this spot they could see that the two men had passed it, and were going on.

Billy and his partner followed boldly after, but just as they were passing under the trees that surrounded the hut, something startling happened.

Two forms sprung suddenly out upon them from the deep shadows, revolvers were clapped to their heads, a strong hand fell upon a shoulder of each, and a voice hissed into their ears:

"Make one move, or give one yaup, you little cusses, and you will be dead before you can do it again. If you know what's good for you, keep still. We mean business, so don't make any mistake."

"I told ye so," croaked Skinny, at once.

"Seems it is so, anyhow," agreed Billy, philosophically.

Neither of the lads made any fuss, great as the surprise was and startling. And there was no chance to resist.

There was no way out of the fix just then. They were under the "drop" only too badly, and well enough did they know it, too.

"Durn me if they ain't cool ones!" cried the other man, in whisper.

"What seems ter be the diffikilty, anyhow, gentlemen?" inquired Billy, coolly enough.

"You will find that out soon enough," was the answer. "All you have got to do for the present is to keep still and quiet, unless you want to go off on the wing to spirit-land."

"Thank ye," said Billy. "We are in no hurry to depart, so we'll do as you kindly suggest."

"And it's the best thing you can do."

This had occupied but a few seconds at most, and now the man gave a whistle signal.

In a moment running steps were heard, and soon two other men appeared upon the scene, who to the great surprise of the prisoners, proved to be the very men they had been shadowing.

It was dark there, as said, but still light enough to make out the features of a person immediately near. The other two, the fellows who had captured the lads, were masked.

Broadway Billy was puzzled.

And for that matter so was Skinny.

The same thought had come to them both at once.

And that thought, what meant this capture? and how had the men they had been shadowing come to have a hand in it?

But these questions were immediately answered, though not to their satisfaction, by Half-breed Brown, who exclaimed:

"Ha! yer thort yer would foller us, did yer, ye little make-believe cowboys! We'll show yer that it don't pay. We got onter yer game. Yer leetle scheme was overheard, an' yer has walked right inter our trap. Yer is too youthful ter book horns with ther likes of us."

But was this the true explanation of it all? Billy questioned it, though he could not think of any other way of explaining it.

While Half-breed Brown was yet talking, he and his comrade had proceeded to bind Billy's and Skinny's hands behind them, a proceeding which the lads did not relish, but which they were powerless to resist against.

"Well," inquired Billy, easily, when that pleasing service had been rendered, "what do you think of doing about it, gentlemen?"

"I told you you would find that out soon enough," one of the masked couple made reply.

"Yes, but being slightly interested," persisted Billy, "I would like to know now, so as to get myself into a proper frame of mind for my fate."

"You are a cool one, and that's a fact," the man observed. "But that won't do you any good now. As to what your fate is to be, that

rests with this gentleman," indicating Half-breed.

"Yer will learn all in good time what it is ter be," that rascal assured.

With that he stepped away a few paces and talked for a moment in low tones with the two masked men, while Cross-grain Jake stood guard over the prisoners.

"Pard, we're in for it," observed Billy to Skinny.

"It's that dream, that's what," Skinny declared, stoutly.

"What's a dream? What ye talkin' about?" So demanded Cross-grain Jake, roughly.

"Why," answered Billy, "we had a dream the other night when everything was still; we dreamed that cheese was sour-kROUT, of which we ate our fill. We dreamed that pumpkin pie was—"

"Shut up!" Jake ordered, in disgust.

"Then don't ask for information if you don't want it," advised Billy.

Now Half-breed Brown left the other two men, who immediately went away, and rejoined his companion.

"What's that he's sayin'?" he demanded.

"Oh, only some guff," was the answer.

"Well, you bring one of 'em along, and I'll take the other, and we'll settle accounts with 'em."

"Wouldn't it be best to gag 'em first, don't ye think?"

"If one of 'em opens his head, we'll kill him on the spot, that's all."

"That's all right, but they might do it jest the same, and make a mess fer us of it."

"Well, mebby you are right. We'll do it, anyhow, fer luck. Then we'll know they can't holler if they want to."

"We'd be just as much obliged to you if you wouldn't," Billy put in.

"We won't ask you anything about it," was the retort.

They were gagged, after some minutes' delay, Billy making good use of his tongue to the last moment.

And that done they set forth, going on further out of the town, and in the direction as Skinny presently discovered, of the gorge where the old woman had indicated as the place of her finding them dead, in her dream.

This discovery gave Skinny's honest little heart great trouble, and he wondered whether Billy had noticed the fact too.

If he did not then, he could not help being aware of it later on, when the trail led abruptly down-hill and finally into that very gorge.

It was a dismal place, and Billy now felt a chill at heart.

He believed there they were to meet their doom, according to the forewarning dream.

They were led into the gorge for quite a distance, but finally the two men came to a stop. And then Half-breed observed:

"I reckon we have gone about fur enough, pardner."

"Well, what's goin' to be done with the fellers?" inquired Cross-grain.

"They have got ter die, that's what is goin' ter be done with 'em," was the decisive response.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW IT FARED WITH THEM.

POOR Skinny uttered a groan.

He could not have helped it had he tried.

And Billy felt like doing the same himself, but did not.

His nerve and will were of steel and iron, as we know full well.

He had no hope that they would escape the fate that awaited them here, whatever it might be.

And he knew, too, that a groan or a sigh more or less would not alter the case any, one way or the other. Such was his logic.

"Well, how be ye goin' ter give 'em their send-off?" asked Cross-grain Jake, with as little regard as though they were contemplating the killing of a chicken.

"I've got a plan in me head," answered Half-breed, "and that's the reason I have brought 'em away out here to this place. Only fur that we could have disposed of 'em nearer to home, and saved the walk."

"Be ye goin' ter shoot 'em?"

"Naw; they ain't worth wastin' powder an' ball on. Besides, th' shots might be heard an' be th' means of gettin' us into trouble."

"Well, then, yer must mean ter tickle 'em with th' knife."

"Naw, not that, nuther. Might git some of th' red on us, and that wouldn't do. Give another guess."

"Hang me if I know what ter guess now, on-

less that's it—hangin', I mean. Have I hit it this time? Is that your plan?"

"No, hangin' won't do. Besides, we hain't got no rope to do it with if we wanted to. No, yer can't guess it, so I'll have ter tell ye. An' no doubt ther lads the'rselfs is dyin' ter know."

"I reckons yer is right about that."

"Well, th' plan that I've got will kill 'em an' bury 'em at ther same time."

"Ther deuce it will. Then I give it up. You'll have ter explain it to me, old man."

"And it is easy explained, and then you'll see how mighty simple it is. Yer knows this heur sand bank over us heur. Well, we will bind their feet and lay 'em close in under it heur at th' bottom, and then go around and push some of the bank down over 'em."

"Wal, I be hanged!" Cross-grain exclaimed.

"That's what I'm goin' ter do," Half-breed Brown affirmed, "and I ruther pride meself on th' plan. There they'll rest till ther day o' judgement, an' nobody will be th' wiser."

Once again Skinny gave out a groan.

"Oh, yer kin groan," cried Brown, "but that won't make no difference, not a bit. That is what is goin' ter happen to you, sure's yer is born. An' it is ther last time ye will poke yer noses into business that don't consarn ye, I'm tellin' ye. Lay holt, Jake, an' we'll tie their feet."

With that the two scoundrels threw themselves upon the helpless lads, bore them to the ground, and proceeded to bind their feet.

It was so dark there that nothing more than the outlines of one another could be seen, even at that close range, but the darkness was no hinderance and Billy and his lean lieutenant were soon bound.

That done, they were picked up, one at a time, and carried and laid close in under the edge of the overhanging bank of loose earth.

It looked as though there could be no help for them now.

"D'ye think they'll stay here till we git around on top?" questioned Jake.

"I don't see how they kin help stayin', do you?" queried Half-breed Brown.

"It has struck me that they might roll away from under here as soon as we leave 'em."

"By hokey! but you are right. I never thought of that, Jake, and that's the truth. But we'll soon put the block to that leetle game. Here's a stout bush. We'll tie 'em together and fasten 'em to that."

"That will fix 'em, sure enough."

This further measure of certainty for success in their diabolical scheme was soon carried out, and there the lads were, utterly helpless.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Half-breed Brown, then, as the two rascals turned away to go, "we'll bid ye adieu, young fellers. You are promisin' young detectives, but we will cut short your careers of usefulness. This is no place fer you ter set up in business, so we'll make use of ye to start a cemetery out here in ther gorge. Good-by, and hope you'll have a pleasant trip. Ha, ha, ha!"

And thus laughing, the human fiends went away.

Hard to tell the thoughts that were in the minds of the unhappy prisoners.

They were thoughts of home, of the mothers who would wait and watch for them in vain, and of their whole past lives.

But their thoughts were suddenly turned from those of despair to others of hope.

Soon after the departure of their enemies they heard cautious steps approach them, and immediately a voice whispered:

"Do not make a sound. I am here to save you if I can. I will balk them in their hellish designs if I can do it. Mind, not a sound, not a sound."

Billy recognized the voice, and knew who the person was.

It was the old hag, Mother Bruja! Swiftly her hands passed over them, feeling to learn just how they were secured.

"Ah-ha!" she exclaimed in whisper, "you are gagged, I find. That is good. I am sure you will not make a noise with your tongues. I will leave you so for the present. But I must make haste."

The next moment they felt her knife sever the thongs that held their feet, then the one that bound them together and that which held them to the bush. And that done she bade them rise, and taking hold of an arm of each she hurried them away.

They passed down the gorge a little distance further, and there stopped and waited.

"I am Mother Bruja," the rescuer whispered.

"You would not heed my warning, so I was resolved to save you if I could. I came here, to

this place where I saw you dead in my dream and here I have waited and watched ever since. I knew my dream was sure to come true, but I hoped there would be a chance to cheat Death of his prey this once. And so I have, so I have. You owe your lives to me, or you will, if you get off free. But you must— Ha! hear that!"

The boys—we may still call them boys, though they were on the threshold of manhood, now—could not help but hear.

There was a sudden rumble, like that of very far distant thunder, then a slight trembling of the ground, followed by a heavy thud that could be felt as well as heard.

And then all was still.

"What an awful fate must have been yours!" the old woman gasped.

Billy was struggling to get his hands free, so that he could get hold of his weapons.

The lads had not been robbed of anything whatever, and could they have had the use of their arms just then they might have made it a sorry piece of work for the villains who had attempted their lives.

The old woman still had hold of the boys' arms, and she understood what Billy was trying to do.

"No, no," she whispered, quickly, "you must not be free yet. You would try to do some desperate thing, and they would overcome you, and my dream would come true after all. No, no, I will not allow it. You are securely bound, and so you must remain till these men are gone."

How Billy did want to use his tongue then! But trying was of no use. The men had bound him only too well.

There was no help for it, they must abide the old hag's pleasure, and they were only too eager not to betray their escape by any noise, while bound.

Some minutes passed, and then the voices of the rascals were heard.

"What did I tell yer?" Half-breed Brown was heard to exclaim.

"Yer has done it fur 'em, sure enough," Cross-grain Jake responded.

"You bet we has. We'll never hear from them again. There's a hundred ton of dirt on 'em, if there's a pound."

"Well, come, let's git back now, fer I don't like ter stay around heur, that I kin tell yer. Not that I'm afeer'd, but it ain't pleasant, yer know."

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, I know. Well, come along, and we're off."

That was the last that was heard of them.

But Mother Bruja kept the lads waiting until she was doubly sure the men had gone.

Billy fretted and fumed, and longed for his liberty, but he had to abide the old woman's pleasure, and it seemed as if she would never release them.

Finally, though, at the end of what seemed an hour, and what may have been a full half-hour, she was ready to set them fully free, yet even then she hesitated, to listen just once more before doing so.

"I guess I can risk it now," she muttered to herself. "Yes, I will risk it now. But you must use caution, brave American boy," she spoke to Billy. "The danger may not be over yet, so be careful, both of you. And now I set you free."

With that she cut the cords that bound their hands.

As soon as his hands were freed, Billy tore the gag from his mouth.

"Sweet pertaters!" he cried, "I thought you would never set us at liberty, old lady. Better late than never, though, I suppose. And I want to tell you right here and now that we are a heap obliged to you for our lives. Thanks must do till we can pay you better."

"And now maybe you will listen to the good old lady," piped up Skinny, he having just freed his tongue, "and be ready to get out of this place as soon as you can do it. I have had just enough of the West to satisfy me, now. That was the closest shave I ever had, and I don't want any more of it. I'm for home by the first train."

"When you get through I suppose you'll be done," observed Billy, quietly. "I will chip in just a word now, if you'll let me. Nary a move for home, or anywhere else do I make till I have had it out with these measly rascals here. Why, we haven't had time to look around the town yet. No, sir, there is a good deal of life left in me, and now it is my innin'."

"But you will not dare to remain here longer!" exclaimed the old woman, excitedly.

"They will kill you, if they discover you now, and in a way that will make doubly sure work of it."

"Can't help it if they do it two or three times over," cried Billy. "They have bucked up against a reg'lar old snag in me, and I'll bet they'll find it out before the game ends, too. No, ma'm, can't oblige you this time, however much I'd like to."

"Then, alas! maybe my dream is to come true yet," the old woman sighed.

"Can't help it," Billy firmly declared. "William o' Broadway, which same is yours truly, is on his muscle now, and if there isn't some blue smoke here in Santa Fe before many hours, I'll resign my seat in Congress, that's all. You have heard what the oracle saith."

CHAPTER X.

BILLY AND SKINNY CAN'T AGREE.

SKINNY and the old witch were both opposed. But their opposition made no difference to Broadway Billy.

His mind was made up, and nothing could turn him from his intention.

"Oh! why will you not heed me?" the old woman sighed. "Have you not seen enough to satisfy you that my dream means something?"

"You bet I have," cried Billy. "But now I think the dream has come to pass, and that settles it. But I don't care a picaroon whether it has or not. You have heard my chirp."

"Then you won't go home with me, eh?" demanded Skinny.

"Nary a go home, my skeleton friend, as you heard me say before," answered Billy, "till this case is brought to a head. No use your whining about it, for that's the verdict of the highest court I recognize in affairs appertaining to my own business. And no fear of your going home either, for you wouldn't leave me, you know you wouldn't. No, sir, it can't be did, so let it drop."

"Well, then," spoke up the old hag, "you take your life into your own hands, my brave young man. But I do admire bravery, and if I can do anything to help you in your determination to bring these rascals to justice, only let me know what it is."

"There, now you are a girl after my own heart!" exclaimed Billy. "That is just what I want. You help us, and your reward will be assured."

"And I will do it. Only tell me what you want. I see you are fully determined, and so will help you."

"All right, then, lend your ears. In the first place, can you take us to your house and let us lodge there?"

"Yes, young gentlemen, I can do that, if you will be satisfied with my humble home and fare."

"Don't mention that part of it," Billy waived. "That's settled, then."

"Yes, you are welcome to come, if that is your desire."

"And it is, and we'll set out at once."

This was agreed to, and guided by the old woman the two supposed dead lads made their way out of the dismal gorge.

Once out of there they could see their way better, in the slight increase of light, and set forth in the direction of the city at a brisk pace.

Billy's tongue was not silent on the way.

He let it run as though trying to make up for the time lost during his spell of enforced silence.

"Another thing that we shall need," he remarked by the way, "and that is a good disguise. How about that, old lady?"

"I don't know," Mother Bruja answered. "What manner of disguise would you desire?"

"Anything that will prove a good one, I don't care what it is."

"If you have money I suppose I can buy anything you want. I will gladly do that for you."

"That's just the cheese! We'll rest easy till morning on that, though, and then we'll begin the warfare in dead earnest."

Finally they arrived at the point where Billy and Skinny had been taken prisoners, and from there it was not a great distance to the home of the so-called witch.

It proved to be a small and humble adobe hut, with no pretensions at anything beyond bare, commonplace comforts.

When the old woman had secured the door she lighted a small lamp that stood on a big box.

This box, as they afterward found out, was used in lieu of a better table.

The light revealed a very small room, with a still smaller one adjoining it in the rear.

"Here you are safe," the old hag assured, "for no one ever comes to see me. I have no callers, or at any rate they are very few and far between."

"And it is just as good as a palace," Billy

hastened to assure. "Don't see what better anybody could ask. I think we'll be able to sleep like logs, right here on the floor if you say so, for I am pretty well tired out."

"Here to," put in Skinny. "I have had a little more than I bargained for, this day and night. We'll sleep till noon, unless you call us, Mrs. Bruja."

"But you mustn't let us do that," Billy hastened. "We must be astir bright and early."

"Never fear but I'll waken you, if you want me to."

"And we do. And be careful not to step on Skinny when you move around, for you might not see him, you know, he's so thin."

"Oh! you shut up!" Skinny cried. "No fear of her steppin' on me, but she will have to look out she don't fall into your mouth, for it's awful big and it's never shut."

"There, now, that is enough for you," protested Billy.

The old woman chuckled over their joking, and when they had done she set about making them a bed on the floor.

"There," she remarked, "I guess you'll be comfortable, and I'll sleep in the back room here where I always sleep. And now good-night."

"Sleep!" cried Billy, "we'll sleep like tops. A king couldn't ask anything better than this. Good-night."

In less than ten minutes both lads were sound asleep, and knew no more till morning, when the old woman awakened them.

"Come," she called them, "it is late enough, and your breakfast is all ready for you."

Billy and Skinny were on their feet in a moment.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "but that was a short night. It don't seem but a minute ago when we lay down."

"I hope it's been long enough for you to come to your senses in and change your mind," observed Skinny.

"Nary a change, little one. Don't mention it again, or I shall be tempted to strike you real hard," making a motion as though to tap him with one finger.

The breakfast proved a very frugal one, but it was enough to satisfy, and the lads did justice to the old woman's efforts.

"Now," said Billy, when the meal was over, "we want to see about that business of getting up a disguise. I want to get out and take a survey of the town by the light of the morning sun."

"Well, I am ready to help you in any way I can," declared the old woman.

"The diffikilty is, what manner of rig are we to take on? Skinny, what's yer think on the question?"

"You know well enough what my opinion of it is," was the answer.

"Then I'll count you out of the argument and go it alone. What we must have is something that can't be suspected. What's it to be?"

"If they see your faces, they'll be sure to know you," remarked the old hag.

"Right you are, aunty," agreed Billy.

"But how would it do to black your faces?"

"There, now you are comin' at it," Billy cried.

"But," Skinny put in, "it won't do for us to be seen together."

"And why not, thou chronic croaker?" Billy demanded. "Are you ashamed of my company?"

"It's 'most time I was getting ashamed of it anyhow; but, they will tumble to us by our size. We'll have to go it alone."

"No fear of that," Billy quickly responded.

"You are almost invisible now, Skinny, and when you come to get blacked up nobody will be able to see you at all."

"You will die of swellin' of th' brain, th' first you know," retorted Skinny. "You are gettin' too smart to live long."

"Putting joking aside, though, Skinny," said Billy, seriously, "your idea is all right. It might give us away to be seen together, even though in disguise. We'll have to go it alone, I guess, makin' this our headquarters."

"Which you are welcome to do," the old woman assured.

"Thanks," from Billy. "I'll tell you, though," he added, "what we can do. I will rig up as a colored girl, which I kin play off to kill, bein' plump and fair and sweet to see—or words to that effect; and you, Skinny, you can be my brother."

Billy's earnest manner, in spite of his playful mood, was winning Skinny to take interest in the affair again.

"All right, I'll do it," Skinny cried. "I think that will do the trick so that we won't

be discovered. But, where are you going to get your outfit?"

"I can see to all that for you," assured the old woman. "Only give me money, and I'll get whatever is needed."

"That's it!" cried Billy. "Oh! we are bound to get thar, Eli; you bet we are, and with both feet, too. Here's money, you dear old soul, you," to the old woman, at the same time giving her a playful slap on the shoulder; "go forth and buy the most elegant and attractive outfit you can find; somethin' real niggery, you know."

This was all talked over in detail, and finally the old woman set out upon her mission.

Billy and Skinny put in the time until her return in conversation, talking about home and their own affairs there, and then coming to the case they had in hand, to take a survey of that.

"I'll tell you what it is," Billy declared, suddenly, while they were talking about it, "we have been barking up the wrong tree, my consumptive shadow, and that's the grim fact before us."

"How do you make that out?" Skinny asked.

"By runnin' the whole thing through a course o' algebraical calculation as it were. What will you bet that Mr. Moreway didn't have a hand in the robbery?"

"Mr. Moreway! Oh, get out, you're foolin'."

"Not a bit of it. I tell you I've been barkin' up the wrong tree, my little pippin, and that's the humiliating fact. Now my suspicion has taken another turn, and Mr. Moreway comes in for it."

"Pshaw!" Skinny exclaimed, "you're crazy. He's no more in it than Walter Sengerland is. The next thing I hear you'll say I am the robber."

"All right, think what you please, Skinny, but you see if it don't come out as I tell you. You remember the voice of the man who captured us last night, don't you? I mean the one who talked most."

"Yes, I remember it a little. Think I'd know it again."

"Well, I thought then that I'd heard it before, but I couldn't tell where it had been. But now it hits me hard that it was the voice of Mr. Moreway."

"Oh! you're 'way off."

"All right, if you think so. But, take this point and chew on it: We did not get into any trouble until after I had shown my hand in the game to Moreway, did we? You can't deny that."

"No, and we didn't get into trouble till after we had gone into that saloon and listened to the two rascals there and then come out and blowed about what we'd do, and right in the street where we was overheard, just as the fellows said. You are off, Billy, away off."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

So they kept it up till the return of the old woman.

They could not agree upon anything save one point, and that was to disagree and see which would be right.

Mother Bruja had performed her duties well. She had procured everything the lads had commissioned her to buy, and exhibited the purchases with some pride.

"You have done well," Billy complimented. "I couldn't have done as well myself if I had tried. No, no, never mind the change," as that was offered to him, "you keep that for your trouble."

"But I did not want any pay, young gentlemen," the old woman protested, "and I—"

"Never mind what you didn't want," interrupted Billy, "just put it away in your inside pocket, and it will come in handy some time. And now we want you to help us rig up in our fantastic costumes. I think I'll cut as good a figger as a darky gal as I did when I was a Chinee."

Picking up a dress, which was a red of the loud polka-dot sort, he proceeded to get into it, much to the amusement of Skinny.

"You'll never do it that way," cried the old woman, and she laid hold to assist him. "You'll tear it. Besides, this skirt must go on first."

"I give it up," declared Billy. "I don't know anything about female rigging. You go ahead and fix me up as you think I'd ought to be. Woman is fearfully and wonderfully made, and that's the fact."

It is needless to dwell upon the half-hour that followed. With the help of the old witch they were both finally fitted out in their disguises, and after a finishing touch or two and an inspec-

tion of her work she declared she couldn't believe they were the same boys.

"You're a darling now, for sure," cried Skinny, taking a survey of Billy.

Billy filled the assumed character well. His face was full and plump, and with the black on he made a really good-looking colored girl. And then with the red dotted dress, a hat to match, a green parasol and a fan, he was well made up. He had on gloves, considering them better than the blacking for his hands.

"And you're a little nigger dude, Skinny, what there is of you, which isn't much. I was going to say: 'Ah, there, my size!' but it wouldn't do. Yo' is nowhere near my size, yo' isn't, honey."

"You shut up about my size," Skinny growled. "But what are we going to call each other? What's your name?"

"Let me give you a pointer right here," Billy switched off.

"Well, what is it?" Skinny inquired.

"You are a dark' now, my slender blade o' grass, and you want to talk the best darky lingo you can muster up."

"All right, honey, I'll try to 'member dat, shua."

"That's the stuff!" Billy complimented. "And now we'll talk nothing else while we are rigged up so, and then we won't make any mistake."

"Well, it am erbout time you was beginnin', den," Skinny reminded.

"Don' yo' worry erbout me," returned Billy. "I is all right, child, I is. And now le's sally out an' take er look around de town."

"But yo' hasn't tol' me what yo' name am," Skinny reminded.

"Shua 'nuff, child, so I hasn't. Well, yo' name am Samuel Johnsing an' mine am Lucinda ditto."

"But I thought we was to be brudder an' sister," Skinny observed.

"Well, who hab said anything to de contrary, Samuel, I should like to know?" Billy returned.

"You, yo'self, dat's who. Yo' said my name was ter be Johnsing an' yo' own name was ter be somet'ing else, I didn't jes' ketch what it war."

At this little misunderstanding Billy laughed heartily enough.

He explained the point, and then when they had exchanged some remarks with the old woman they passed out.

They set off immediately in the direction of the center of the city, intending to go to the closed bank first, to see who might be around there, and then on to the hotel, perhaps.

Finally reaching the bank they found no one there save the old darky whom they had seen on the previous day.

Many were passing up and down, of course, but he was the only one who was idling there.

He was seated on the steps, as before, with his head supported in his hands.

Giving Skinny a nudge and a word to put him on his guard, Billy stepped up to the old darky and spoke to him.

The old fellow looked up quickly.

"Did yo' speak ter me?" he asked.

"Shua I did, uncle," Billy answered. "I asked yo' if de bank am closed."

"Yes, hit am closed, chil," was the sorrowful affirmation. "Hit hab been robbed clean out."

Billy gave a gasp, stopped fanning himself and almost let his parasol drop to the ground. His eyes opened their widest, and he showed his perfect teeth in a way that almost caused Skinny to laugh.

"Robbed!" he repeated; "yo' don' tol' me so. An' ain't dey no mo' money in de instertution er tall uncle?"

"Prashus little, an' dat am de fack."

"Good hebbens! what be we gwine ter do? Dar I had sebenteen dollars in dat bank, all in good money, an' now it am gone, an' me with a poor consumptive brudder on my han's, and both of us orphings."

And Billy looked as though it would have taken but little more to make him weep salt, sad tears.

Skinny had to turn away to hide his broad grin.

"Oh! hit will be all right," the colored man hastened to assure. "De bank hain't gone bu'sted, hit am only sufferin' wid temp'rary suspenders, dat am all. Hit am gwine open ergain in er few days, and yo' sebenteen dollars will be all right."

Billy's smile returned, and he brought up the parasol and set his fan in motion once more.

"Glad to hear yo' say dat," he declared. "I 'clar' I was skart when I foun' de place shut up. But if it am all right I'm happy."

Come erlong, Samuel, an' we will mope erlong an' take in de sights."

With that he and Skinny went on, leaving the old darky looking after them in something of a puzzle.

The old fellow knew most of his color at Santa Fe, and wondered who these two could be.

There was no suspicion in his mind that they were not what they seemed.

"Well, Samuel," observed Billy, as the two proceeded in the direction of the hotel where they had put up, "dey war nuffin' to be picked up at de bank, an' now we'll tackle de hotel. I reckons we'll go dar an' 'ply fer board; what yo' say?"

"Yes, and get found out," Skinny complained dropping the dialect. He could not give expression to the objection in lighter vein.

"Yo' must stick to de lingo, Samuel," Billy cautioned. "Yo' am too fo'gitful, yo' is. I bet yo' hab done fo'got what yo' sister's name am; now hain't yo'?"

"Hang me if I haven't," Skinny had to admit.

"Well, it am Lucinda, an, yo' don' want ter fo'git it. An' yo' want to talk nigger lingo, too, an' mind dat."

By this time they had reached the hotel, and there was no chance for further talk upon Billy's proposed plan.

Billy went right up the steps and boldly into the ladies' entrance of the house, and Skinny had to follow.

There happened to be a girl in the hall, and Billy addressed her.

"Am de landlord at home, miss, does yo' know?" he inquired.

"Yes, 'he is in the bar-room," was the response.

"Well, will yo' done tell him dat a young lady would like to see him fo' a minute?"

The girl responded that she would, and went to deliver the message, Billy and Skinny waiting in the hall.

The landlord soon made his appearance, and Billy stood in the best light the hall afforded to give him a chance to recognize him if he could.

This was one of his reasons for coming to the hotel. He wanted to put his disguise to the test, and he felt that if he could pass under the eyes of the landlord undetected he could trust it anywhere.

"Wal, miss, what do you want o' me?" the landlord inquired.

"I want to ask yo' if yo' will 'low me an' my pore brudder to stop heah for a day or two while I look about fo' work in San' Fe."

"Wal, I don't know about that," was the answer. "This ain't no charity establishment, an'—"

"Oh! bless yo'!" cried Billy, quickly, "I hab money to pay, if dat am all yo' is dubious erbout. We jes' want er place ter sleep, an' we kin eat in de kitchen if yo' draws de line at pussons ob our shade o' complexion, sah."

"Wal, on them tarms, I reckon you kin stay," the landlord agreed.

"But, say," he added, "what sort o' work are you lookin' fur?"

"My best holt am waitin' on young ladies," Billy answered, "but at present I am open to 'most any sort ob engagement, sah. Would like a place in some good family, if I could get it."

"Wal, now I happen ter know where a good girl is wanted," said the landlord, "and it might be that you could git the place."

Billy seemed to have got himself into it here. He did not want any place, and had only said so for want of something else to talk about.

But he did not know what was coming—that he had begun in just the right course to make a success of the case he was working on.

"Where am dis place yo' mentions?" he inquired.

"It is in the family of Mr. Singerland, the bank president."

"Sweet pertaters!"

So Billy exclaimed in mind, and he had to shut his teeth hard to keep from saying it aloud.

"He am de president ob de robbed bank, ain't he?" he asked. "I wonder if I could git dat place. Will yo' tell me where he lives, sah?"

The landlord gave the desired directions, saying further that any one in the town could show the house if his directions were not plain enough. And then, when the lads had engaged a room for the rest of the week, which, as Billy explained, was the proper thing to do, in case he could not get the situation, they left the hotel and set out in the direction of the banker's residence.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, when they were clear of the house, and the dialect was too cumbersome to give expression to his feelings; "but we are in for it now, Skinny, my gay and festive colored dude. I'm going to hire out as a work girl, if I can do it, in some capacity or other, and you'll have to shirk for yerself for a little while. You can make your headquarters at the hotel and at the old woman's but, and you'll be big help to me as my outside ally. Skinny, we are going to jerk this colored gentleman out of the woodpile now; I feel it in my bones."

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY BEHIND THE SCENES.

THE two detectives lost no time in making their way to the neighborhood of Mr. Singerland's residence.

They had agreed that they could perfect no plans until Billy learned whether he was able to get the situation or not.

Accordingly, Skinny was to wait on the corner until Billy had put that matter to the test, when Billy was to rejoin him and they would talk it over.

With that understanding they parted, and Billy went boldly to the house.

It was about as fine a residence as Santa Fe could show, and Billy felt that the chances for his getting employ there were slim indeed.

But that thought did not deter him from making the trial, and he went boldly to the lower entrance and knocked loudly at the door, which was soon opened.

As it happened, it was a colored girl who came to the door, and that gave Billy some hope. That colored servants were employed there spoke favorably for his getting the vacant place.

"Am de missus in?" he inquired.

"She am," was the answer.

"I hearn she want a girl," Billy went on, "an' I am heah to apply for de job, if it ain't yet taken."

"Yes, so we do want a girl, and pow'ful bad, too," the servant declared. "I will tell de missus yo' is heah."

"What am de job dat am sufferin' fo' somebody to tek it?" Billy inquired.

"Hit am de place ob chambermaid. Yo' jest wait right heah an' I'll done tol' de missus in one minute."

Billy waited, of course, and the girl went off.

"Chambermaid, eh?" he thought to himself. "Wonder if I kin fill that bill? Guess I'd better not brag what an expert I am in that line, anyhow. I'll leave plenty of room for an easy fall."

In a few moments the colored girl returned, preceded by the lady of the house, a splendid-looking woman, past middle age.

She favored Billy with a keen, searching look, and observed:

"You want a situation, do you?"

"Yessum," Billy answered, politely, with a jerky bow.

"Have you any references?" was asked.

"Haven't none in writin', ma'am," Billy had to own, "but I kin tell yo' ob folks what knows me."

"Where are you from?"

"From Texas, ma'am."

"You are a good ways from home."

"Yes, so I is. I didn't find some 'lashuns heah, what I specks must be dead, an' so I want to git work."

"Well, to whom can you refer in Texas?"

Billy gave the names of his friends there, readily enough.

Then came the question as to whether he had ever acted in the capacity of chambermaid.

"Well, no, I nebber hab, not jes' dat," he admitted. "But I is willin' to learn," he added, "de mos' willin' pusson yo' ebber seen, ma'am."

"Well, what have you been doing, then?" was asked.

"I hab been handy at de table, ma'am," was Billy's answer to that, with the mental addition that he meant handy with a knife and fork; "an' I has 'tended de door a good deal."

Billy put in his best licks, as the pert saying has it. He wanted to secure the situation, in order to get a view behind the scenes in the Singerland family. A good many questions were put to him, but he was equal to them all, and in the end had made a good impression upon the lady.

"Well, I will try you," she finally decided.

"When can you come?"

"In erbout a nour," Billy answered. "Yo' see," he explained, "I hab a sickly brudder with me, an' I must see him settled in a place to board."

Fack is, I has got him a room at de hotel, but I must see him comf'ble 'fo' I leaves him. Soon as I do dat I will be heah."

"All right, come, and I will try you. And now about the wages—"

"Nebber yo' mind 'bout dem, ma'm," Billy interrupted. "Yo' pay me what yo' jes' please, if yo' find me wurf anything er tall."

This seemed to make a good impression upon the lady, and assuring that she would make it all right, she allowed him to go.

Billy lost no time in rejoining his lean lieutenant.

"Hit am all right, Samuel," he exclaimed. "Yo' han'sum sister am engaged as chamber-maid in a most 'spectable family."

Skinny had to laugh at the idea of Billy's playing such a role as that.

"They will find you out before you are there an hour," he predicted.

"All right if they do," returned Billy, "but I'm betting they don't. But, now let us get down to business and lay some plans."

And so engaged they made their way back toward the hotel.

Before they reached there Skinny suddenly interrupted Billy in something he was saying, and pointed to the opposite corner.

"Look there!" he directed.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed in turn.

The cause of their excited words was simple but effective.

On the corner were standing Walter Singerland and Half-breed Brown, in conversation.

"What do ye think o' that, Skinny?" Billy asked. "Sick your dog on my cat if this case don't rattle me."

"I don't like the looks of it," Skinny admitted, "but I ain't ready to haul down my flag yet that Walt is innocent. I tell you his face shows it."

"And I ain't ready to give up my new suspicion against Mr. Moreway, either," declared Billy; "but this sort o' puts me back onto young Singerland again. It is a puzzler, my gay and festive little tomtit."

"I agree with you there," coincided Skinny. "Let's stop and see what they do. No use trying to get near enough to hear."

This they did, and while pretending to be talking earnestly, were watching the two men.

Young Singerland and the rascally Brown talked for some minutes, when they parted company and went off in opposite directions.

"It is a puzzler to me," declared Billy again. "I don't know what to think about it all, but I'll soon be able to pipe off the Singerland family a little, and then I'll have more light on th' subject."

The lads continued on to the hotel, talking over their plans as they went along.

By this time they were quite at home in their disguises, and did not fear detection. And it was pretty certain that neither Half-breed Brown nor Cross-grain Jake would take them to be the fellows they had buried under the sand-bank.

They spent a little time in their room at the hotel, after which Billy took the opportunity to slip into their own room proper for a moment, and then he took leave of his lean lieutenant and set out for the scene of his new avocation.

At the hotel he had heard some comment being made by the landlord upon the disappearance of the two young cowboys who had come there on the previous day, but of course he did not stop to enlighten him any.

When Billy reached the Singerland home, he knocked at the lower door as on the other occasion, and was admitted.

He had now taken the extra precaution to blacken his hands, and as he had a woolly wig he was not afraid but that he would escape detection for a little while anyhow.

He found the colored domestic quite an agreeable personage, and fell into conversation with her immediately.

It was a big relief to his mind when he found that the chamber duties for that day had all been performed, and that there was little for him to do.

He asked all the questions he dared, of the colored girl, and learned a good deal about the family. But he learned nothing to the discredit of any one of the household.

One little piece of information that was given rather upset his calculations, and told him that his sojourn there must of necessity be brief.

And that was, that he would have to share the room of the other domestic.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed in thought, "that puts the veto to my staying long in this camp. That is rather more than I bargained for."

Too much of a good thing gets to be tiresome. No, I reckon I'll have to decline with thanks."

Billy did not make very free about the house, but took things rather easy, only keeping his eyes and ears open.

The afternoon was waning when there came a ring at the bell.

It was part of Billy's duties to answer the bell and he went to the door.

The caller proved to be Kenward Whiteheath, and he asked for Walter Singerland.

The young man was in, and so Billy informed.

"Very well, I'll run right up to his room, then," Whiteheath said, and with no further ceremony he started.

Billy closed the door, and he, too, went upstairs.

If there was any chance for doing so, he wanted to hear what passed between these two young men.

In the room next to Walter's was a pipe-hole that connected the two rooms, as Billy had already observed, and he thought that would answer his purpose.

And so it proved. When he applied his ear he could hear all that was said in the next room.

"Yes, I have heard of the suspicion," Walter was saying, "and it pains me greatly. I can assure you that father is as innocent of such a crime as I am. Both of us are blameless in the matter."

"But this detective, it seems, claims to have proven that your father has been passing some of the stolen money. Mind you, I do not believe the suspicion, but something must be done to set the detective right before he goes any further."

"Yes, I know it, but I don't know what is to be done. And then there is Mr. Moreway. I cannot see why he should be so determined to force attention upon us. I am sure he has no real reason for so doing. I swear to you, Kenward, that father and I are innocent in the matter."

"Of course you are. I have no thought otherwise."

Just then came a ring at the bell again, and Billy had to dodge down to the door.

This time it was the detective, Downsley.

He wanted to see Mr. Singerland.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY CATCHES ON NOW.

BILLY ushered him into the parlor with all ceremony.

Mr. Singerland was up-stairs in his wife's private sitting-room.

Going up there, Billy announced the caller, and when the banker had gone to the parlor Billy had business in the room adjoining it in the rear.

Folding doors separated these rooms, and they happened to be open a very little, just enough to accommodate the young detective's eye and ear. And he made use of the advantage.

"Yes, I have heard that you have found a clew, sir," Mr. Singerland was saying, the first words Billy caught, "and it strikes me that you have not been very discreet about the matter. You seem to have told about it freely enough."

"Perhaps I have spoken out when I should not have done so, sir," the detective responded, "but that is done and can't be undone now. What I desire, sir, is to drop the case right where I am. If you will kindly advance the pay that is due me, I will go away immediately."

"This is rather sudden, is it not? What is your reason for this move?"

"I was taking it for granted that you have heard the import of the clews I am in possession of, sir."

"And so I have. It seems that your suspicion points to me as the thief."

"Such is the fact. For that reason I want to drop right out of the matter. You have been a good employer, and I cannot go ahead and follow up the clews that all point so strongly in your direction."

"You are very considerate, anyhow," Singerland observed. "And if I will pay you off, will you go away and take these clews with you?"

"Ha!" thought Broadway Billy, "there is milk in this cocoanut, sure. If Singerland comes to any such terms as these, he's the oyster I'm raking for, and I'll bet on it. If he don't, then I'll join forces with him for keeps, that's all."

This passed through his mind in a second, for there was no break in the conversation.

"Yes," answered the detective, "I will drop right out and go away, and these clews will disappear with me. You will not be troubled on

account of them, because no one else will ever be able to find them."

"Well, that will be a big thing, certainly. What are these clews of which you speak? How came you to turn your attention to me?"

"To tell the truth, sir," was the cool reply, "I thought of you or your son at the very first, owing to the fact that the safe was found open and uninjured. And then the great eagerness with which both of you urged me to the work of finding the robber made me suspect you the more. And I was not alone in my suspicions, either, for others have expressed the opinion that you know more about it than any one else."

"But the clews," asked Mr. Singerland, with impatience.

"Well, sir, some of the stolen money has been spent by you since the robbery, and I have gathered it up after you."

"You are an infernal liar and scamp!" cried the bank president, hotly. "I defy you to prove it."

The detective smiled.

Billy's suspicion was against the banker, strongly.

"Well, look at these, then," the detective quietly said, taking some bills from his vest pocket. "One of these you spent at Dun's yesterday, and the other at Howard's this morning."

Mr. Singerland took the bills and looked at them closely, and as he did so his face paled.

"It is impossible," he muttered. "There must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake," the detective insisted.

"But how could these bills come into my hands after the robbery?"

"You still insist that you are innocent, do you?" observed the detective.

"Of course I do," was the prompt reply.

"Dare you show me what money you have in your pockets this minute, sir?"

"Confound your impudence," was the cry, and the banker started up as though he would pitch the detective out of doors. "But, I must keep cool," he immediately added. "Of course I dare show you my money, and will. Here, look at it as much as you like."

With that he tossed his pocketbook into the detective's lap.

Downsley opened it, took out the money and examined the bills one by one.

He proceeded carefully, and when he had done he had selected six bills from among the others, and he handed them to the banker.

"Cast your eyes over these," he invited. "You will find that they belong to a series you claim was among the stolen funds."

Billy watched his face narrowly, and noticed that it paled still more, and that there was a nervous twitching about the mouth.

"I must admit that these bills were with the stolen funds," he slowly spoke, when he had examined them all. But I do not know how they came to be in my possession. There is some trickery back of all this, Downsley."

"I haven't anything to say about that, sir," responded the detective, "but I have the proof I have shown you. Now, sir, if you will pay me what is due me, and let me drop quietly out, I will go away and you will have no trouble in the matter further. I don't want to arrest you."

For some moments the banker sat quiet and thoughtful.

Broadway Billy awaited his decision eagerly.

And it was soon forthcoming.

Taking his pocketbook from the detective's hand, he rose, drew himself up with dignity, and said:

"Mr. Downsley, I am innocent of the charge you make, and I will not allow you to go away in the manner you suggest. If you consider your proofs sufficient, arrest me. Otherwise take yourself out of my presence in as short a time as possible."

There was no room for further argument after that. It must be one thing or the other, and that at once.

And it was a decision that highly gratified Broadway Billy.

"Bully for you!" he thought. "Now I'm for you, Mr. Singerland, and here's my hand on it, though I reckon I'd better not show it just yet. Take your salts like a man, Downsley, old boy, and put up or shut up."

"I will not arrest you now," returned the detective, he also making a show of dignity. "If you want to see me, send for me."

With that, and a bow, he was gone.

The banker paced the floor, talking to himself.

"Would that I could lay hands on the thief," he muttered. "Would that I could know the right one, and lift this load from my mind. This is terrible, to be under this suspi-

cion, and knowing that I am as innocent as a child unborn. And it is worse to have the finger of suspicion pointing at my son."

At that moment Walter and his friend came into the room.

"Who has been here, father?" the young man asked.

"It was Downsley, the detective."

"And has he told you—"

"Of the suspicion against me? Yes, he has, and of the clues he claims to have discovered."

"I had heard of it before, father, but I could not tell you. I hoped it was some mistake that would come to nothing."

"And a mistake it is, son, but one that I am at loss to explain."

"But the marked bills, what of them, father?"

"It is true that they must have passed through my hands, but I swear that I do not know how they came into my possession."

"Then you are innocent, father— Forgive me for such a question, but—"

"Walter, my son, I am innocent. Can you assure me the same?"

"I swear it, father."

"It is enough."

The father and son clasped hands, and tears were in their eyes.

"That settles it," thought Broadway Billy.

"Skinny was right, and hereafter I will take off my hat to his judgment, thin as he is. Now my business here is done, and I guess I'd better go and resign. But I'll hold on a little, yet, and see if I can't play for further points here."

Mrs. Singerland and her daughter came into the room while the others were talking, and Billy heard more than enough to convince him that the Singerlands were entirely innocent of any part in the great robbery.

Billy stood ready to hasten from the rear room at the first sound of alarm, or to respond to the bell should it ring, but for a long time he was not obliged to leave his post of vantage.

Finally all left the room save Kenward Whiteheath and Rosamond Singerland.

As soon as they were alone they embraced fondly.

"Yum-yum!" exclaimed Billy, to himself. "They must be engaged, I should say. Reckon it is about time for me to retire, too."

He was about to draw away from the doors when something that was said caused him to stay.

"I have something of importance to tell you, Kenward," spoke the young lady, "and it is something that I thought best to mention to you before I told father about it. Father is so worried and nervous already, you know."

"What is it, dear?" the young man asked.

"I believe it may lead to a clew to these robbers."

"Ha! is that so? Well, tell me about it at once."

"You know Job Muller, who was employed in the bank?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"He has sent me another pressing offer of marriage. He is not aware that we are engaged, you know."

"The scoundrell! He is not worthy to look at you."

"Do not worry, I shall not accept the offer," smiling. "But with the offer is a hint that perhaps he can be of service to me in more ways than I imagine, just at this time, provided I will have him."

"What can he mean?"

"I do not know, unless it is something about this robbery."

"It may be that it is. But tell me all that he says. I must look into the matter."

"That is about all, except that he wants an answer immediately, and wants me to marry him this night, secretly, if at all."

At this the young man laughed.

"Well, that is rich, I must own," he exclaimed. "But we will attend to his case, and see what there is in it."

"And shall I tell father?" asked the lady.

"No, I would not, yet. He might act too hastily in the state of mind he is in at present. I will put a smart detective upon it at once."

This was something that Broadway Billy did not want done. This was just the role he wanted to play himself. With a tap at the door to announce his coming, he drew the door apart and entered the room.

"I reckon I is de pussun yo' wants to see at about dis stage ob de proceedin's," he observed with a grin.

CHAPTER XIV.

BAITING THE DEADFALL.

MISS SINGERLAND and her lover looked at Billy in amazement.

Billy returned their stare with a broad grin upon his blackened face.

"What do you mean, Miss Impudence?" demanded the young lady, severely. "No one called you here."

"Golly! nobody had any need ter call me," responded Billy; "kem in widout callin'. Fact is, I want to talk with you in private."

This last sentence was spoken in Billy's natural tone and manner, and the two persons could only stare at him in greater astonishment than ever. They knew not what to make of it.

"I am not exactly what I seem to be," Billy rattled on, "and I am ready and more than willing to help you to clear up this bank robbery mystery, and clear Mr. Singerland of the suspicion that is against him. So, as I said, I think I am just the person you want to see now."

"Who the dickens are you?" demanded Whiteheath.

"My rightful name is Billy Weston," was the straight answer.

"Then what are you doing here in such a rig as this?" asked Miss Singerland.

"Thereby hangs a tail," responded Billy.

"I'll reel off the whole chapter to you, if you will lend me your attention for a minute, and then you'll understand all about me and why I am here."

"Let us have your story, by all means," said Whiteheath.

"All right, but if anybody comes in while I'm tellin' it I'll cork right up, for I don't want any one in it but you and Miss Singerland."

"Very well, but perhaps no one will interrupt. And I warn you that your story will have to be remarkably clever, if you want us to take any stock in it; eh, Rosamond?"

"Indeed, yes. It will have to be a remarkable story, I should say, if it is to give us any confidence in him, after the manner in which he has gained entrance into our house."

"I'll risk all that," exclaimed Billy, and he proceeded with his story forthwith.

It is needless to say that he had attentive listeners.

And fortunately no one entered the room to interrupt him in the recital.

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Rosamond, when the end was reached.

"It is quite remarkable," commented Whiteheath, "but it is evidently true."

"It is just as true as the sun, moon and stars," Billy averred, earnestly. "I have given you the facts as straight as a string. And now, as I said, I want the satisfaction of rounding up these p'izen rascals and bringing them to the end of their rope with a snap. And I can do it, too, if you'll let me go ahead now in the way I have proposed."

"You might get caught again, though," objected the lady.

"I'll try to look out for that. You just fix up a note for this fellow Muller, and let me take it to him. I am in just the right disguise for work of that kind. He'll never suspect me."

"Shall we do it, Kenward?" the young lady asked her lover.

"Yes, I approve of the plan," was the answer.

"Very well, I will do it."

"Bully fer you!" cried Billy. "Now if we don't bring this thing to a focus before very long I miss my guess, that's all."

"But what am I to say to the villain?" Rosamond asked.

"That's jest one of the fine points of the play," declared Billy. "You must parley with him, as it were, and wind up by saying that you cannot bring yourself to answer at once and by note. Request him to meet you at some point at about an hour after dark."

"But I would never agree to meet him," the lady exclaimed quickly.

"You won't be required to meet him," explained Billy. "You just let me know the place, and I'll attend to the meeting part of it, you bet."

"Ha! I begin to catch your idea in full now," declared Mr. Whiteheath.

"I mean to make a capture of the fellow," explained the young detective, "and scare him into turning against the rest of the rascals. If I can do that I will be able to bag them in short order."

"A good idea, a good idea. Prepare the note you will send him, Rosamond, and let the young man carry out his plan."

"But just hear me orate a little more," interposed Billy. "I want this all kept perfectly still for the present. If I can bring everything around to suit me I want to capture the whole p'izen crew at once. Want to make one grand

swoop of it as it were, and give 'em a surprise they will remember."

"And especially the fellows who tried to kill you, I suppose."

"You bet. If I don't make 'em sick I'll apply for a change of name, and that is all. I'll—"

But just then a step was heard, and a door opened.

It proved to be Mr. Singerland, and he came right in and toward the trio.

Billy realized that his presence there must be explained immediately, and in a very matter-of-fact way, so he said:

"Yessum, I kin find de place. Did you say git fo' yards ob de goods, an' a spool ob white thread?"

And this he said so naturally, just as though in answer to a question the lady must have asked, that it was a successful ruse.

As he said it, too, he moved to back out of the room in the way he had come, as though he had been on the point of going anyhow.

Whiteheath "caught on" immediately, and signaled to the lady, and she, too, taking the cue, responded:

"Yes, that is it, and now be off with you and hurry back."

Billy was off at once, closing the doors after him, and the next moment the door leading from the rear room to the hall was heard to close. But Billy had not gone out. Instead, he returned to listen again.

He heard nothing of interest, as Mr. Singerland had merely wanted to speak with the young man upon some matter of other business, and he soon took his leave from the room again.

"How was that for high?" asked Billy, once more slipping back into the front parlor. "And now I must scoot out of here, for I have been absent from the lower regions too long already. Please prepare the note, Miss Singerland, and as soon as it is ready call me and let me be off with it."

"I will write it immediately," was the promise.

A few other remarks, and Billy left the room, when the young lady prepared the decoy letter, assisted by her lover.

Billy was talking away to the other colored domestic, making himself agreeable to her, when he was called to come up to the hall above.

"Dere am Miss Rosamond wantin' ob yo'," the colored girl quickly whispered. "Yo' better go right up, quick, Lucindy."

"I'm off, like a cake off de griddle," returned Billy, and he started immediately.

The young lady was awaiting him in the hall, and when he had put on his hat and gay shawl, and had armed himself with his parasol and fan, he was ready to set out upon the errand.

The note he received was addressed to Mr. Job Muller, and Billy was given very careful directions where to find that worthy.

"Now for it," Billy muttered, when he set out. "I am getting there now, and it strikes me that when I get the ring in the nose of this chap, all the rest of the p'izen crew will soon be squealing. We shall see."

He looked around sharply for Skinny as he went along, and especially in the neighborhood of the hotel, but the lean lieutenant was not in sight.

Billy's destination was a hotel of the third rate order, not a great distance from the closed bank.

Arriving there, he entered in a make-believe timid manner, and inquired for the man he was in quest of.

As it happened, Job Muller was in the bar-room of the house at the time, and the note was carried in to him.

Billy waited in the hall for the answer, and he had not long to wait. In a few moments the door opened and Muller came out.

It needed but a glance to show that he was highly elated over something that the note had told him, for he was flushed, smiling and eager.

"Did you bring this?" he asked.

"Yes, sah, I am de pusson what done fotch it," Billy assured.

"You are a good girl," the man complimented.

"Are you one of Mrs. Singerland's servants?"

"Yes, sah; I lib dah, sah," was the assurance.

"Well, wait just a few moments and I will send a reply to this."

Billy agreed to wait, and the man darted upstairs as though his heels had wings attached.

"Sweet pertaters!" the lad exclaimed to himself, "but he is eager after the bait. I'll land him like a hungry rat, the first he knows."

In a little while the man reappeared, with a sealed note in hand, and giving it to the sup-

posed colored miss, he impressed the importance of not losing it, and sent her back.

Billy set out in the direction of the Singerland residence, flirting desperately with a colored barber whose shop he passed on the way, but he did not go right home.

When he had gone far enough to deceive Muller, were he watching, he changed his course, and in due time was at the hut of Mother Bruja.

The old hag was at home, and was highly pleased to see him. Skinny was not there.

"I suppose he's at the hotel, snoozin'," Billy suggested.

"Yes, perhaps," the old hag supported. "I hope no harm has come to him."

"Oh, I guess not," Billy reassured. "He's so very thin, you know, that harm wouldn't have a very easy job to find him. But say, Mother Bruja," he quickly added, "I want your help in a little skeem I've got on hand."

"You shall have it," was the ready promise.

"Only tell me in what way I can serve you, and I will only too cheerfully do all I can for you."

"I was sure you would. I'm going for those robbers, and if I can win the first trick against them I am pretty sure of all the rest."

He went ahead then and unfolded his plan.

The old woman fell in with it at once, and agreed to his proposal.

Having fixed that, Billy left a verbal message for his partner, in case he came there, and took his leave.

When he arrived at the Singerland home the message he brought was eagerly opened by Rosamond, and was heartily enjoyed by her and her lover.

A little time later came a summons at the area door, and the applicant proved to be the lean lieutenant. He wanted to see Billy, and his desire was speedily gratified.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE RAT IN THE NEAT TRAP.

"WHAT yo' want, yo' po' lean little orphing?" Billy sympathetically asked.

"I wants to see yo'," Skinny made answer.

"Kin I see yo', fo' erbout a minute, alone?"

"Yes, I specks yo' kin," agreed Billy. "Come right in, yo' po' child yo', an' rest fo' a minute or two."

Skinny entered, Billy closed the door, and the thin partner was conducted to the spacious kitchen, where he was introduced.

"Dis am my po' sickly brudder," Billy made known. "He hab gone into decline ob consumption, an' I don't speck he am long fo' dis world. Yo' kin see dey ain't much left ob him."

Skinny was immediately the object of sympathy, and he could have choked his partner with a good will.

After a few minutes Billy asked him out into the rear hall, and there inquired what he wanted.

"I am onto their haze now, Billy, sure," he declared in whisper.

"S'pose you have got the dead proof against Walt Singerland, haven't you?" asked Billy.

"Oh, try to talk sense. You know he isn't the one. I've got the proof that he is innocent, if that suits you."

"And it does, I'll own. I have found out the same thing. But, what is your tale of woe that you want me to hearken to? Reel it off."

"That last guess of yours was right."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, "what was my last guess? I am all the time trying to guess something or other."

"And I guess you're right. But I mean your suspicion against Henry Moreway. He is the king-bee of the p'izen lot."

"You don't say so! But I felt sure of it. How did you get at it, my gay and festive young Pinkerton?"

"Why, I was in the bar-room this afternoon, sitting there doing nothing, and he asked me if I didn't want to earn a quarter. I asked how, and he said he wanted a letter taken to a man in another part of the town. You can believe I was ready to earn the quarter. I'd have paid a dollar for the privilege, if necessary."

"I should smile if you wouldn't," agreed Billy.

"Well, the note was for the Half-breed Brown, at the same saloon where we played shadow on him and his pard last night. I went there, and I was a little afraid that he might recognize me, too, but he didn't. Jake, his partner, was with him. Brown opened the note and read it, and when he had done he turned it over to Jake and remarked that the boss was going to settle with them that night."

"And was that all you heard?" asked Billy, as Skinny paused there.

"No, not quite all. Moreway is to meet them at ten o'clock to-night, at that old adobe cabin where they captured us, and there the settlement is to be made, and the rascals are going to get out of Santa Fe at once, in different directions. I thought I would come right and tell you, for that will be our chance to gobble them, if we expect to gather them in at all. What do you think?"

"Sweet pertaters! What do I think? I think you're a brick, Skinny, lean and hungry-looking as you are. We'll be there, sure, and if there isn't a surprise party there at the hour named then I give you leave to kick me, that's all. But, say, I have got a little trap to spring before that one is ready."

"And what's yours?"

"I'm going to catch Job Muller."

"And who the dickens is Job Muller?"

The name had escaped Skinny, as the man had not been prominent.

Billy explained it all, and directed Skinny to go to the old woman's hut and remain there till he came.

A careful understanding was had, after which Skinny took his leave, Billy going with him to the door and cautioning him to be careful of his health.

"Yo' knows yo' is a po' frail flower, honey," he remarked, "an' yo' must be 'stremely keerful ob yo'self. If yo' gits a cold yo' is a goner, shua, an' dat I is tellin' yo', so be wery keerful, child."

Under the circumstances Skinny had no redress, as he could not retort, but he made his mind up to the effect that he would get even with his partner on some other occasion.

Evening came on in due time.

At the hour set for the meeting between Miss Singerland and Job Muller, Billy set out from the Singerland residence to go to the place agreed upon.

He was still in disguise as a colored girl, of course, and no one had suspected that he was anything other than what he seemed. He could play the role to perfection.

When he reached the rendezvous he found Mr. Muller already there, dressed in his best.

He was clean shaved, had a bouquet in his lapel, had on a brand new pair of kid gloves and sported a cane.

And he was looking his prettiest, too, as he kept watch for the appearance of his expected idol, but when he caught sight of Billy a shade of disappointment swept over his face.

"Well, what word do you bring me?" he demanded, as soon as Billy came up.

"I has a very 'tic'lar message fo' you," Billy answered, importantly.

"Well, what is it?" was the eager inquiry.

"Does yo' know where old Mother Bruja lib, sah?"

"Yes, of course I know; but what about her?"

"Well, sah, de leddy done say she meet yo' dah."

"What is her reason for changing her mind, and selecting such a place as that old hag's hut?"

"She done say you might ask dat, sah, and I was to tell you, sah, dat she think dat de bes' place, 'cause no one be likely to come foolin' round dere."

"And she sent you to tell me to come right there?"

"Shua; an' Lis ter go with yo'."

"All right, then; come along, only keep behind me."

"Shamed ob my 'plexion, hey?" laughed Billy.

"Well, I don't keer; yo' go on an' I'll foller yo'."

"Is the lady there now, do you know?"

"I 'speck she am, sah, but if not, yo' is to wait dere fo' her."

"All right. She must have a good reason for changing the place of meeting, I have no doubt."

With that Mr. Muller set off in the direction of the old hag's hut, Billy following on behind at a respectful distance.

In due time the adobe house of the old witch was reached, and Muller stopped for Billy to come up with him before he knocked at the door for admission.

"Is the old woman expecting us?" he whispered.

"Yes, she hab been told," Billy answered.

With that he, Billy, knocked.

The door was opened by the old woman.

"Oh! it is you, is it?" she greeted. "Come in, sir," to Muller. "The lady is not here yet, but no doubt she will be, soon."

Billy walked right in, and Muller followed him, taking a seat in a chair the old woman placed for him on the side opposite the door, yet not near the rear door.

"I have seen you often, Mother Bruja,"

Muller remarked, when he had taken the seat, "and I have heard a good deal about you. They say you are an expert at fortune-telling."

"Well, yes, it is so," the hag acknowledged.

"And would you mind telling my fortune, while I am waiting?"

"Not at all. But what is it you would desire to know in particular, sir?"

"Well, I want you to tell me whether I shall experience the happiness that I have nearest to heart."

At that moment there was a sound at the rear door, and Skinny, still in his disguise, entered and stood just within the door.

Before the old woman had time to respond, Billy took it upon himself to give the answer for her.

"I reckon I kin answer dat problem fo' yo'," he remarked.

"What do you you know about such things?" Muller demand sharply.

"I know dis much," returned Billy, at the same time covering the fellow with a revolver, "an' dat am, if yo' don't put up yo' han's mighty soon, down will come yo' castle, an' dat I's tellin' yo'."

And with the words he squinted along the barrel of the weapon in a way that caused Muller to turn pale.

"Wh—wh—what is the meaning of this?" he cried.

"It means that you are my prisoner, that's what," Billy answered in his natural voice.

Muller grew more pale than ever, and one hand made a motion as though in search of a weapon.

"Hold on!" Billy warned. "Up with your hands, or I'll be under the unpleasant necessity of drilling a hole in you that will fit you for a pine box. I mean genuine business, so don't make any mistake."

Muller's hands were now up, and he sat trembling in his boots.

"But wh—what does it mean?" he asked. "Do you mean to rob me? Have I been led into a trap here?"

"You have been led into a trap, sure enough," Billy informed, "but we have no idea of robbing you. You must lack a button to think Miss Singerland would meet a sick pill like you by appointment, like this."

"But what do you mean? What do you want? Who are you, and why have you brought me here?"

These questions were rattled off quickly enough.

"It means that you are a prisoner, to answer for your part in that bank robbery," said Billy. "Who I am don't matter. You'll find that out, if you live long enough."

Muller was now completely broken and terrorized.

"Heavens!" he gasped, "you can't mean it. I know nothing about that robbery, on my honor I don't."

"Your honor be hanged," cried Billy. "You haven't got any of the article. You are in a bad box now, and there isn't but one way out of it for you."

At a motion from Billy, Skinny had stepped forward and clapped a pistol to the head of the trembling coward, and as Billy spoke he clapped handcuffs on his wrists in short order.

Muller uttered a groan.

"You must let me go!" he gasped. "I'll give you five hundred dollars if you will let me escape. I'll give you all—"

"No-use," Billy broke in. "You are in for it, and there's only one door open for you, and that isn't open very wide, either. You are in a tight box."

"What is it you mean?" the unhappy wretch eagerly inquired.

"You must tell all you know about the affair, and give the name of every one who took part in it."

"I'll do it," was the instant agreement. "I'll do anything, if you will only let me get off. I'll tell you the whole thing, from first to last."

CHAPTER XVI.

DRAWING THE DRAGNET.

At that moment the door opened, and into the small room stepped Walter Singerland and Kenward Whiteheath.

The prisoner looked at them in helpless fear, while Broadway Billy regarded them in somewhat of surprise. He had not looked for them there.

"You here," he spoke.

"As you see," answered Walt, smiling.

"We thought you might need help," added Whiteheath.

"And thought we would be on hand in case you did," Walter supplemented.

"Well, you see I didn't," observed Billy.

"So we see," returned Whiteheath. "You seem to be no novice at this sort of business. You did the job neatly."

"For Heaven's sake let me go," pleaded Muller. "I will tell you all I can, and then let me get out of this part of the country as fast as steam can take me."

"We will let you tell your story first," Broadway Billy told him, "and we'll talk about other things after that. Go right ahead, now, and these gentlemen will be witnesses to what you have to say."

"But you will promise to let me go, will you not?" the rascal whined.

"We'll promise nothing," snapped Billy. "We'll see what sort of story you get off first, and then we'll talk about that."

"Yes, you infernal scamp!" cried young Singerland, "tell us what you know about this robbery, and that with as little loss of time as you can get about it."

"Oh! Mr. Singerland! you will let me go, won't you?" whined the fellow. "You won't be hard on me, will—"

"Shut up!" ordered Whiteheath, sharply. "Tell us all you can, and after that we'll attend to your case."

Muller was a thoroughly cowed man.

The handcuffs on his wrists seemed to chill him all over.

He broke down, begging and crying, but was finally driven to a confession.

To set his confession forth just as he recited it, would be to draw out this chapter beyond limits.

It was a clever scheme, and one that ought to have been successful, if careful planning counted for aught in the matter.

Henry Moreway, according to the confession, was at the head of the robbery. It was he who planned it, with the assistance of Detective Downsley, Muller, and Half-breed Brown and Cross-grain Jake.

Moreway and Downsley had made their appearance at Santa Fe at about the same time. Moreway had made a deposit of ten thousand dollars in the bank. Afterward he had recommended Downsley to Mr. Singerland for the post of bank detective. This post the rascal got, and after that he proceeded to sound the employees of the bank.

Finally he selected Muller as his man, and proposed to him the scheme, at the same time threatening his life if he dared to divulge the secret. Muller was thus in a manner forced into the plot, according to his own story, though he had no heart in it. And it was he who left the safe open on the night of the robbery. He had made a duplicate key.

He, Muller, was in love with Rosamond Singerland. After the robbery, and when suspicion was being turned upon Mr. Singerland, it entered his head that if he could obtain an interview with Rosamond, he could oblige her to marry him in order to clear her father's good name of the suspicion. And once she was his wife, then he felt that the family would save him from any disgrace in the affair, and he could expose the others without fear. Such was the shallow plan he had in mind.

Moreway was handling the matter with skill, and probably would have made a success of it had it not been for the interposition of Broadway Billy and his lean lieutenant. It was Moreway who had managed to get some of the stolen money into Mr. Singerland's possession, and who, with the help of the detective, was pushing the case against him with all the power at his command. And he it was, too, who had planned the death of Billy and Skinny as soon as Billy had made himself known to him. All the minor points the reader can readily supply.

"And you expect us to let you go free, after that, do you?" demanded Walter Singerland.

It was all he could do to keep from choking the rascal then and there.

"You see I was forced into it," the cringing wretch whined. "I could not help myself. I was forced—"

"Bah!" mocked Broadway Billy.

"That sort of story won't help your case any," put in Whiteheath.

"But you promised you would have mercy on me, if I would tell all I could about it, and—"

"Said nothing of the sort," interrupted Billy.

"We will give you the chance to be a witness against the others, and that's all we will do for you. If you get off easy for that, it will be more than you deserve."

This stand was taken by the others, and in a little while the party set out from the hut, taking the prisoner with them.

Before going, however, Billy and Skinny had

laid off their disguise, and appeared in their proper persons.

The prisoner was taken by a circuitous route to the lock-up, where he was put in a cell and under good guard, and then the youthful detectives, with help sufficient, started out to capture the rest of the evil set.

When they arrived at the old adobe hut, the place of meeting, they were about half an hour early.

This was all the better, and just what they had calculated on.

Taking up their stations in convenient places, they waited patiently for the coming of their prey.

Two of the party were armed with dark-lanterns, and the others had their revolvers in hand, ready for instant use.

Finally steps were heard, and four men came down the road from the direction of the city and entered the old hut, closing the door after them.

Soon after a very dim light was seen within, and the watchers, looking in upon the fellows, recognized them as Henry Moreway, Detective Downsley, Half-breed Brown and Cross-grain Jake.

"Where can that man Muller be?" Moreway was heard to question.

"Impossible to tell," answered Downsley.

"He was notified to be here, was he not?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, we'll wait a little while, and if he does not show up he will get left, that is all."

"And sarve him right, too," spoke up Half-breed Brown.

"An' we'll have all the more to ourselves," mentioned Cross-grain.

The watchers made no move yet.

There was yet one point they desired to learn, if possible.

And that point was, where the stolen money had been hid away pending the dividing of spoils.

The wait was not a very long one, on the part of the robbers. They were not safe there, as they knew and acknowledged to each other.

"Well, we'll wait no longer," Moreway finally decided. "If that fellow is not here it is no fault of ours. I'll give you your portions of the money, and we'll get away from here as speedily as possible."

With that he stooped and took up a loose portion of the floor of the hut.

And there lay the stolen funds of the bank, a sight that made Walter Singerland's heart leap.

Now Broadway Billy gave the signal, the doors were thrown open, front and rear, both at the same moment, and the watchers sprang in.

"Up with your hands!" was the cry from all.

It was a surprise such as had not been dreamed of.

At first no one offered to move or speak, and the next moment they were powerless to do so.

Billy and the others, and there were about seven of the party, threw themselves upon the rascals, and they were speedily disarmed and bound.

One thing that had served to unnerve the fellows, was the sight of Broadway Billy and Skinny, alive and in the flesh. That sight had rendered them utterly incapable of moving.

It had proved a far easier victory than any one had expected.

But it was natural, under all the circumstances. The attack had been so sudden and so surprising.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Broadway Billy, now giving vent to his feelings, "but this is like old times. How do you like it, my gentle cherubs? S'pose you are glad to see me and my partner alive and kicking, ain't ye?"

"It's all up," muttered Moreway, leaning back helplessly against the wall. "I give in, but there is one thing I want to ask, and that is how you boys got out of that death-trap you were put into."

Billy laughed.

"Don't let a little trifle like that worry you," he said. "Let it be enough for you to know that we came out alive and well, and right side up with care. You do not know Broadway Billy and his slender pard, or you would never have tried to kill us. But we have turned the tables on you, old hoss, and here you are."

Two more amazed men were never seen than Half-breed and Cross-grain.

It was some time before they could do anything other than stare at the two victims of their evil plot.

In the mean time Walter Singerland and Kenward Whiteheath had gathered up the stolen treasure, making it into a bundle, and soon all were ready to set out.

Space forbids, or much of the interesting conversation of the hour might be set forth. Later on, the four fellows were in the lock-up, company for the one already there, and Billy and Skinny were being entertained like princes at the Singerland residence.

"The idea," Mrs. Singerland exclaimed more than once, "that my new servant should turn out to be a detective in disguise."

Next day the city rung with the news, and Billy and Skinny were looked upon as beings a little more than human. Their names were upon every tongue.

They appeared at the hearing of the prisoners that forenoon, and Billy's recital of his part in their arrest was greeted with cheer upon cheer. It was the biggest sensation of the year.

The proof was conclusive, there was no chance for the rascals to get out of the net, and they were sent back to jail to await trial. The prospect before them was not by any means a cheering one. And they vowed hatred undying against the brave lads who had been the main cause of their coming to grief.

The bank reopened that same day, and Billy was promptly paid the reward that had been promised. And not only that, but a sum besides, which just doubled the amount. And he, in return, deposited half of it in the bank to the credit of Mother Bruja, the old woman who had saved the lives of himself and Skinny. At first the old woman would not accept it, but was finally prevailed upon to do so, and her gratitude was great.

"That's the kind of pippins me and Skinny are," declared Billy at the hotel, where he was treated like a royal prince, and required to tell about the affair over and over again; "and when we take hold of a case somethin' generally happens. We make mistakes once in a while, and sometimes get into trouble, but when the bag is shook for the last time we generally come out on top of the heap. I am not much past being a boy yet, and Skinny is only a shadow, but when there is a tussle between right and wrong, and we get a chance to chip in, you can bet that we take sides with truth every time. And now, Skinny, my gay and festive little shrimp," Billy said finally, "as we have time for a breathing-spell, let's go out and take a walk about the town. We have not had a fair look at it yet." And so we take leave of them for the present, to take them up again, perhaps, for another adventure in that sleepy old town of Santa Fe.

THE END.

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- 347 Deadwood Dick's Ducats; or, Days in the Diggings.
- 351 Deadwood Dick Sentenced; or, The Terrible Vendetta.
- 362 Deadwood Dick's Claim.
- 405 Deadwood Dick in Dead City.
- 410 Deadwood Dick's Diamonds.
- 421 Deadwood Dick in New York; or, A "Cute Case."
- 430 Deadwood Dick's Duty; or, The Chained Hand.
- 443 Deadwood Dick, Jr.
- 448 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Defiance.
- 458 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Full Hand.
- 459 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Round-Up.
- 465 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Racket at Claim 10.
- 471 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Corral; or, Bozeman Bill.
- 476 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dog Detective.
- 481 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Deadwood.
- 491 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Compact.
- 496 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Inheritance.
- 500 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Diggings.
- 508 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Deliverance.
- 515 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Protegee.
- 522 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Three.
- 529 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Danger Duck.
- 534 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Death Hunt.
- 539 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Texas.
- 544 Deadwood Dick, Jr., the Wild West Vidocq.
- 549 Deadwood Dick, Jr., on His Mettle.
- 554 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Gotham.
- 561 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Boston.
- 567 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Philadelphia.
- 572 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Chicago.
- 578 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Afloat.
- 584 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Denver.
- 590 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Decree.
- 595 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Beelzebub's Basin.
- 600 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Coney Island.
- 606 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Leadville Lay.
- 612 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Detroit.
- 618 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Cincinnati.
- 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Nevada.
- 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in No Man's Land.
- 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr., After the Queen.
- 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Buffalo.
- 648 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Chase Across the Continent.
- 654 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Among the Smugglers.
- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Insurance Case.
- 666 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Back in the Mines.
- 672 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Durango; or, "Gathered In."
- 678 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Discovery; or, Found a Fortune.
- 684 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dazzle.
- 690 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Dollars.
- 695 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Danger Divide.

Other Novels by E. L. Wheeler.

- 26 Cloven Hoof, the Buffalo Demon.
- 32 Bob Woolf; or, The Girl Dead-Shot.
- 39 Death-Face, Detective; or, Life in New York.
- 45 Old Avalanche; or, Wild Edna, the Girl Brigand.
- 53 Jim Bludsoe, Jr., the Boy Phenix.
- 61 Buckhorn Bill; or, The Red Rifle Team.
- 69 Gold Rifle, the Sharpshooter; or, The Boy Detective.
- 80 Rosebud Rob; or, Nugget Ned, the Knight.
- 84 Idyl, the Girl Miner; or, Rosebud Rob on Hand.
- 92 Photograph Phil; or, Rosebud Rob's Reappearance.
- 98 Canada Chef; or, Old Anacanda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 98 Watch-Eye; or, Arabs and Angels of a Great City.
- 118 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
- 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Sport Detective.
- 121 Cinnamon Chip, the Girl Sport.
- 125 Bonanza Bill, Miner.
- 133 Boss Bob, the King of Bootblacks.
- 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent.
- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective.
- 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
- 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scamps.
- 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo.
- 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective.
- 213 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventriloquist Hunter.
- 226 Snoozer, the Boy Sharp; or, The Arab Detective.
- 236 Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado.
- 240 Cyclone Kit, the Young Gladiator.
- 244 Sierra Sam, the Frontier Ferret.
- 248 Sierra Sam's Secret; or, The Bloody Footprints.
- 253 Sierra Sam's Pard; or, The Angel of Big Vista.
- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.
- 273 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Rival Heirs.
- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decey; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 291 Turk the Boy Ferret.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.
- 299 A. No. 1, the Dashing Toll-Taker.
- 308 "Liza Jane, the Girl Miner; or, the Iron-Nerved Sport.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Co., the Detectives of Philadelphia.
- 350 Little Quick-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggersville.
- 354 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 359 Kangaroo Kit's Racket.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Blood.
- 358 First-Class Fred, the Gent from Gopher.
- 364 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Life Lottery.
- 372 Yreka Jim's Prize.
- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
- 382 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
- 385 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 389 Bloyele Ben; or, The Lion of Lightning Lodge.
- 394 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.
- 400 Wrinkles, the Night-Watch Detective.
- 416 High Hat Harry, the Base Ball Detective.
- 426 Sam Slabside, the Beggar-Boy Detective.
- 434 Jim Benk and Pal, Private Detectives.
- 438 Santa Fe Sal, the Slander.
- 446 Sealskin Sam, the Sparkler.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 7 The Flying Yankee; or, The Ocean Outcast.
- 17 Ralph Roy, the Boy Buccaneer; or, The Fugitive Yacht.
- 24 Diamond Dirk; or, The Mystery of the Yellowstone.
- 62 The Shadow Ship; or, The Rival Lieutenants.
- 75 The Boy Duellist; or, The Cruise of the Sea-Wolf.
- 102 Dick Dead-Eye, the Boy Smuggler.
- 111 The Sea-Devil; or, The Midshipman's Legacy.
- 116 The Hussar Captain; or, The Hermit of Hell Gate.
- 197 Little Grit; or, Bessie, the Stock-Tender's Daughter.
- 204 Gold Plume; or, The Kid-Glove Sport.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Plains.
- 222 Grit, the Bravo Sport; or, The Woman Trailer.
- 229 Crimson Kate; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
- 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
- 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freelance Heir.
- 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure.
- 269 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, "The Gold Ship" Chase.
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
- 284 The Sea Marauder; or, Merle Monte's Pledge.
- 287 Billy Blue-Eyes, the Boy Rover of the Rio Grande.
- 304 The Dead Shot Dandy; or, Benito, the Boy Bugler.
- 308 Keno Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
- 314 The Mysterious Marauder; or, The Boy Bugler's Trail.
- 377 Bonodol, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 387 Warpath Will, the Boy Phantom.
- 398 Seawalk, the Boy Lieutenant.
- 402 Isador, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 The Boy Insurgent; or, The Cuban Vendetta.
- 412 The Wild Yachtman; or, The War-Cloud's Cruise.
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- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Coaster.
- 474 Florn; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 483 Ferrets Afloat; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
- 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 503 The Royal Middy; or, The Shark and the Sea Cat.
- 507 The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Outlawed Middy.
- 520 Buckskin Bill, the Comanche Shadow.
- 525 Brothers in Buckskin.
- 530 The Buckskin Bowers.
- 535 The Buckskin Rovers.
- 540 Captain Ku-Klux, the Marauder of the Rio.
- 545 Lieutenant Leo, the Son of Lafitte.
- 550 Lassie's Legacy; or, The Avenging Son.
- 555 The Creole Corsair.
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- 565 Kent Kingdom, the Card King.
- 570 Camille, the Card Queen.
- 575 The Surgeon-Scout Detective.
- 580 The Outcast Cadet; or, The False Detective.
- 586 The Buckskin Avenger.
- 591 Delmonte, the Young Sea Rover.
- 597 The Young Texan Detective.
- 602 The Vagabond of the Mines.
- 607 The Rover Detective; or, Keno Kit's Champions.
- 617 Ralph, the Dead-Shot Scout; or, The Rio Raiders.
- 644 The Hercules Highwayman.
- 650 Butterfly Billy, the Pony Rider Detective; or, Buffalo Bill's Boy Pard.
- 656 Butterfly Billy's Man Hunt.
- 662 Butterfly Billy's Bonanza.
- 668 The Buccaneer Midshipman.
- 674 The Wizard Sailor; or, Red Ralph, the Rover.
- 679 The Sea Shadower; or, The Freebooter's Legacy.
- 686 Orlando, the Ocean Free Flag; or, The Tarnished Name.
- 692 The Rival Sharps; or, Redfern, the Secret Service Scout.
- 697 The Scarlet Sombrero; or, The Sharp from Texas.

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- 8 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Dead-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fancy Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

- 118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
- 122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
- 126 Pienyone Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
- 130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
- 142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
- 147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
- 152 Black Bear, Will Wildfire's Racer.
- 157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
- 162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
- 165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
- 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
- 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
- 179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
- 183 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
- 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
- 189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
- 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
- 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
- 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
- 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
- 225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Darky.
- 235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
- 242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
- 252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
- 262 The Young Sharps; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
- 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
- 289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
- 298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
- 305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in Quaker City.
- 324 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
- 341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
- 353 The Reporter Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
- 367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
- 379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
- 408 Firefly Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
- 423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
- 428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
- 432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
- 456 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
- 466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
- 479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
- 484 Wild Dick Racket.
- 501 Boots, the Boy Fireman; or, Too Sharp for the Sharper.
- 566 The Secret Service Boy Detective.
- 594 Jimmy the Kid; or, A Lamb Among Wolves.
- 627 Tom Bruce of Arkansas; or, The Wolf in the Fold.
- 635 Plucky Paul, the Boy Speculator.
- 667 Bob and Sam, the Daisy Detectives.

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- 360 Silver-Mask, the Man of Mystery.
- 369 Shasta, the Gold King; or, For Seven Years Dead.
- 420 The Detective's Apprentice; or, A Boy Without a Name.
- 424 Clibuta John; or, Red-Hot Times at Ante Bar.
- 439 Sandy Sam, the Street Scout.
- 467 Disco Dan, the Daisy Dude.
- 490 Broadway Billy, the Bootblack Bravo.
- 506 Redlight Ralph, the Prince of the Road.
- 514 Broadway Billy's Riddle.
- 524 The Engineer Detective.
- 536 Broadway Billy's "Dimkilty."
- 548 Mart, the Night Express Detective.
- 557 Broadway Billy's Death Racket.
- 571 Air-Line Luke, the Young Engineer.
- 579 The Chimney Spy; or, Broadway Billy's Surprise-Party.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton.
- 605 William O' Broadway; or, The Boy Detective's Big Inning.
- 615 Fighting Harry, the Chief of Chained Cyclone.
- 628 Broadway Billy's Dead Act.
- 640 Barebrek Beth, the Centaur of the Circle.
- 647 Typewriter Tilly, the Merchant's Ward.
- 659 Moonlight Morgan, the "Pizenest" Man of Ante Bar.
- 669 Broadway Billy Abroad.
- 675 Broadway Billy's Beat; or, Beating San Francisco's Times.
- 687 Broadway Billy in Clover.
- 696 Broadway Billy in Texas.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

- 23 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
- 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
- 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captains.
- 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
- 82 Kit Harefoot, the Wood-Hawk.
- 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
- 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
- 123 Klown Charley, the White Mustang.
- 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
- 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
- 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack from Red Cora.
- 185 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
- 198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
- 207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
- 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Tonknot's Crusade.
- 231 Plucky Phil; or, Rosa, the Red Jezebel.
- 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
- 255 Captain Apollo, the Kling-Pin of Bowles.
- 267 The Buckskin Detective.
- 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
- 294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowls Blade of Gochetopa.
- 302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bully.
- 316 Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.
- 326 The Ten Pardos; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the La-so.
- 345 Pittless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 356 Cool Sam and Par; or, The Terrible Six.
- 366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Outlaw; or, The Buccaneer's Girl Foe.
- 394 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose of Ranch Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
- 425 Texas Trump, the Border Rattler.
- 436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox.
- 445 The City Vampire; or, Red Rolfe's Pizenz.
- 461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Keno Bar.
- 470 The Boy Shadow; or, Felix Fox's Hunt.
- 477 The Excelsior Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
- 499 Single Sight, the One-Eyed Sport.
- 502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
- 512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
- 521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge.
- 528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
- 538 Dodger Dick, the Dock Ferret.
- 548 Dodger Dick's Double; or, The Rival Boy Detectives.
- 558 Dodger Dick's Desperate Case.
- 568 Dodger Dick, the Boy Vidocq.
- 573 The Two Shadows.
- 582 Dodger Dick's Drop.
- 594 Little Lon, the Street-Singer Detective.
- 610 Old Skinner, the Gold Shark; or, Tony Sharp on Guard.
- 626 The Champion Pard.
- 637 Dick Donn, the Dock Boy Detective.
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- 671 Jersey Jed, the Boy Hunter; or, Shadowing the Shadower.
- 685 Happy Hugh, the Boy-Musician Detective.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
98 William Street, New York.